



BOARDROOM
THE BEST RESOURCE FOR ASSOCIATIONS

Voice, Vision, Impact: The Advocacy Advantage

2025 VOLUME 1 | VOLUME 2 | VOLUME 3 | VOLUME 4

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LETTER TO OUR READERS

Is Innovation Overrated?

Let's be honest: in the world of association management and events, "innovation" is everywhere. It's in mission statements, strategy decks, and every third sentence of any conference keynote—just think about the last congress you attended and we're positive the word was all over the place.

We're told to disrupt, to reinvent, to innovate or die.

But here's a challenge: what if innovation is overrated?

As we write this, we can hear you raise your eyebrows. But we're not saying we should stop evolving, far from it actually. But the breathless chase for the "next big thing" sometimes distracts us from what actually builds trust and delivers value to members: consistency, clarity, and community. These things aren't flashy. They don't get standing ovations. But they work.

Not every association needs to be a tech lab. Not every event has to feature holograms and AI-powered matchmaking. Sometimes, what your members really want is a well-organised event where they see familiar faces, engage in meaningful discussion, and leave with a few solid takeaways they can actually use.

Sometimes, "just" doing the basics well is all that there is.

In our attempt to keep up with shifting expectations, we risk abandoning the steady foundations that made associations powerful in the first place—shared purpose, peer-to-peer learning, advocacy that moves the needle.

These things take time. They don't always scale. And they don't always fit neatly into an app, tempting as that last one can be.

So maybe it's time we reframe innovation—not as constant disruption, but as thoughtful adaptation. Small, deliberate changes that strengthen our community, not just dazzle it.

As you read through this issue of Boardroom and its special feature on Advocacy, you'll see plenty of smart ideas and forward-thinking approaches.

But what ties them together isn't innovation for innovation's sake.

It's relevance, it's strategy for maximum impact.

And yes—sometimes the courage to stick with what works.

Because sometimes, being bold doesn't mean being new.
It means being true.



Céline Volz

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Voice, Vision, Impact: The Advocacy Advantage

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By Vicky Koffa, with Remi Deve

Reflections on the European Association Summit 2025

The 2025 edition of the European Association Summit (EAS), held on 10 April at The Merode in Brussels, arrived at a moment when the connective role of associations in society feels more central than ever. Organised by the European Society of Association Executives (ESAE) for the second time, the event gathered a cross-section of European association professionals under the theme “*Association Excellence in a Shifting Society*.” It was a summit that asked not only ‘how’ associations adapt to uncertainty, but ‘why’ they must lead with clarity, empathy, and strategy.

Leading with Values in Times of Change

From the opening plenary, it was evident that the summit was not designed to challenge. ESAE President Mohamed Mezghani was explicit: *“Our associations are the will of our societies. This is a fact, and we must learn how to build consensus in a fractured world, how to guide communities in the context of geopolitical change and how to lead with values when values are under threat.”*

The values thread continued strongly throughout the programme, particularly in the session on *Association Leadership and Values*. There, speakers echoed the sentiment that values must not be a ‘nice to have’, they must drive strategy. Jean-Luc Eiselé from the World Heart Federation said: *“You can always adapt, but your values are who you are; that is not negotiable.”* This was brought to life with examples ranging from the World Heart Federation’s solid commitment to equity, to Eureka’s push for openness in collaborative innovation despite increasing regulatory pressure.

Conversations also addressed practical implications: whether to host events in politically misaligned countries, how to codify values in board structures, and how to manage stakeholder tensions when consensus is elusive. These honest discussions didn’t bring easy answers, but they clarified that excellence demands courage, coherence, and consistency.

Consensus and Communication in a Polarised World

The plenary on *Consensus Building* was perhaps the most revealing about the political and societal tensions that now underlie association work. Benedetta Berti of NATO spoke candidly about reconciling 32 nations’ strategic red lines while still finding unified responses to threats. *“Consensus isn’t compromise,”* she said. *“It’s about crafting something stronger than any single viewpoint.”*

Alongside her, Erika Staël Von Holstein from Imagine Europe explored the emotions driving today’s conversations — fear



about the future, frustration with the present, and longing for the past— and how these shape different perspectives. Her research into “narrative communities” showed how data and empathy can turn polarisation into productive dialogue. She showed that associations, like the societies they represent, need to be flexible enough to handle differences, while still providing a sense of stability.

This focus on emotional intelligence also resonated in the session on *Geopolitical Change*, where speakers from health, tech, and agriculture sectors stressed the need for association executives to act as emotional barometers for their members, recognising distress, refocusing energy, and maintaining strategic orientation even amid disruption.

Engaging the Next Generation

One of the standout moments of the day came from the “*Coz we’ve always done it like this...*” session, focused on the expectations of Generation Z doctors and patient advocates. The message was clear: this generation is not interested in being talked *to*, but in helping shape the conversation.

They want hands-on, simulation-based learning. They value short, impactful TED-style talks. And they need spaces that support both wellness and connection. More than one association shared their transition from traditional hierarchical structures to inclusive governance that places young members at the core: appointing them to boards, co-designing programmes with them, and even empowering them to lead reverse mentoring initiatives.

As one patient organisation shared, inclusion only works when young people see their goals reflected in the association’s priorities and when they are trusted as contributors, not token voices.

Shifting from Broadcast to Dialogue

Parallel to this was a deep dive into communication strategies. The discussion was practical, grounded, and self-critical. Associations are realising that legacy email

campaigns and static brochures are no longer fit for purpose. Instead, what’s emerging is a model rooted in segmentation, experimentation, and dialogue.

We heard how one association exceeded 1,000 registrations for an event in Dublin by combining targeted email marketing with micro-content on LinkedIn and testimonial-driven video. Another spoke of their pivot to humour-based quizzes and Instagram engagement to

connect with younger members. What united these examples was not their format but their intent: to treat communication as a two-way channel that reflects the needs of members. ESAE’s own *Communities of practice* was mentioned to maintain momentum between events, ensuring that learning continues.

At a time when sustainability professionals find themselves navigating an increasingly complex and often contradictory policy environment, the *Resilience and Adaptability in Sustainability Strategies* session, moderated by Boardroom

Chief Editor Remi Deve, offered both a timely reality check and a hopeful path forward. In her opening remarks, Magali

Horbert, Sustainability & Strategic Communications Manager at FIDI, acknowledged the sense of fatigue many feel—referencing the Omnibus Simplification Package and shifting U.S. policy—but reframed the moment as a necessary transition. Drawing on the Gartner Hype Cycle, she argued that we are moving through a messy phase toward a more stable “standardisation plateau,” largely driven by EU legislation. Her call to action? That associations use this moment of relative pause to take the lead in defining what sustainability truly means for their sectors, their members, and their missions.

In the end, EAS 2025 offered frameworks, provocations, and a sense of community. As ESAE’s President rightly said, “*We must build on the lessons learned during the COVID pandemic, though today’s disruptions are even more complex, because our members, boards, sponsors and partners often face very different realities and hold diverse opinions.*”

THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION AWARDS

Capping the day was the ceremony for the European Association Awards, where I had the honour of serving as a judge. The submissions this year showed technical achievement, vision, inclusivity, and social impact.

The four winning initiatives - ESSKA (European Society of Sports Traumatology, Knee Surgery and Arthroscopy) for its work on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion; EARMA (European Association of Research Managers & Administrators) for Event Innovation; Bioenergy Europe for Digital Communication; and EBI (European Boating Industry) for Impact - demonstrated what “association excellence” means today: responding to real needs, using new tools wisely, and driving positive, lasting change.

Stay tuned on Boardroom’s website to find out more about the winning projects and the associations behind them.

By Vicky Koffa

Association Portrait

EFIM's Unified Voice for Internal Medicine in Europe

As part of Boardroom's Association Portrait series, we spoke with **Aneta Trajkovska**, Executive Manager of the European Federation of Internal Medicine (EFIM), to learn more about the organisation's steady growth and evolving role within the European medical landscape.



Aneta Trajkovska

Since its founding in 1996, EFIM has expanded to represent 48 national

societies, building a broad platform for

collaboration in education, research, and policy. With initiatives such as the EFIM Academy, a growing portfolio of hybrid learning opportunities, and the annual European Congress of Internal Medicine held in a different city each year, the federation continues to adapt to the changing needs of internists across the continent.

For readers less familiar with EFIM, could you briefly introduce the organisation and highlight how it has evolved in recent years?

The European Federation of Internal Medicine (EFIM) is a scientific non-for-profit organisation

that brings together national societies of internal medicine from across Europe and beyond. Founded in 1996, EFIM aims to strengthen the identity and visibility of internal medicine in Europe and to promote high standards in education, research, and clinical practice. Over the years, EFIM has grown significantly, expanding its network proud to represent 48 national societies of internal medicine.

In the past ten years, EFIM has undergone significant growth and transformation embracing digital innovation, developing collaborations with international internal medicine organisations, European specialty societies, and expanding its educational initiatives. These include online platforms such as the EFIM Academy and EFIM Webinars channel, as well as in-person programmes like the Winter and Summer Schools, the EFIM Exchange Programme, the Clinical Research Seminar, and the European Congress of Internal Medicine, ECIM, the only internal medicine congress of its kind held in Europe.

This evolution reflects our continued commitment to meeting the evolving needs of internists particularly in the wake of the pandemic and to adapting to the shifting healthcare landscape across Europe.

EFIM's membership now spans over 48 national societies. How do you maintain a sense of balance and inclusion across such a diverse network?

Maintaining inclusivity and balance across such a broad and diverse membership is key priority for EFIM. We ensure equal representation through our General Assembly, EFIM Working Groups, Early Career Subcommittee and EFIM Young Internists Section providing every member society with a voice in shaping EFIM's mission.

Transparent decision-making during EFIM meetings, and comprehensive leadership practices all contribute to a strong sense of shared ownership and participation.

We also strive to reflect the diversity of our network in the Executive Committee and in key EFIM projects, including scientific programmes, webinars, and other major activities. Our aim is to ensure that EFIM remains a unique platform supporting every society large or small feels heard and share the sense of belonging to EFIM.

As EFIM has grown, what challenges have emerged on the operational side, and how have you tackled them?

As EFIM continues to grow, so does the complexity of our operations whether in governance, planning scientific programmes for the Congress, or selecting future destinations for our educational activities. To meet these challenges, we are investing in improved digital collaboration tools and expanding our administrative capacity, including the current recruitment of additional staff to support our office operations.

A key priority has also been ensuring sustainable financial and governance frameworks to support our expanding range of activities. In response, we have strengthened our strategic planning processes, the membership structure, undertaken a detailed update of our Statutes and internal by-laws to include clearer and better regulations. We also have strengthened our internal agreement with our publishing partner, and initiated new partnerships with equivalent organisations across the



globe including United States, South America, Asia, and Australia.

Ongoing dialogue with our member societies, supported by regular surveys to assess their interests and needs, ensures that we remain informed, responsive, and aligned with EFIM's primary mission.

The European Congress of Internal Medicine has become a central platform for EFIM. Where is it held, and how has it developed in recent years?

The European Congress of Internal Medicine (ECIM) is EFIM's premier event and a main networking platform that brings together physicians, researchers, and experts in internal medicine. Held annually in different European cities, the Congress is organised in close collaboration with a national society, developing strong local engagement.

EFIM began independently organising the Congress in 2016, with the first individual congress taking place in Amsterdam. Nearly a decade later, ECIM has more than doubled in size and has gained recognition not only across Europe but also internationally.

The scientific programme now features high-level, multidisciplinary sessions, including plenary lectures, debates on controversial topics, and specialised tracks and workshops for every internist. The active involvement of our Young Internists Section and the Early Career Subcommittee has enriched the Congress, making it especially dynamic and interactive.

We were proud to welcome over 2,200 internists to ECIM 2025, held in Florence this past March. Building on that success, we are already preparing the programme for ECIM 2026, which will take place in Vienna, for the first time hosting ECIM in the Austrian capital.

To increase accessibility, we have also integrated virtual modules into the Congress, making recorded sessions available to colleagues around the world through EFIM Academy and the congress website. This approach ensures broader participation and extends the impact of ECIM well beyond the conference days.



The Return to the Office: Rebalancing the Future of Work

Special Boardroom contributor **Dr Ole Petter Anfinssen** explores the controversy around remote work and the benefits of returning to the office.

The COVID-19 pandemic drove a shift in how organisations manoeuvre, with many transitioning from traditional office settings to fully remote work almost overnight. What started as a substitute or interim measure soon revealed unexpected benefits—greater flexibility, cost savings, and access to a broader talent pool. Yet, as remote work settled into routine, deeper challenges began to surface, questioning long-term viability. Today, the debate isn't about whether remote work should exist—it's about how we balance it with in-person interaction to maintain culture, collaboration, and innovation. While remote work has its merits, the isolation it can create poses a real threat to individual and organisational health and sustainability.

Leaders and organisations must consider how to reintroduce the office, not as a relic of the past, but as something critical to future success.

The hidden costs of remote work

Initially, remote work and working from home seemed like a win-win situation. Numerous people felt more in control of their time, and businesses saw a fairly consistent output. But over time, it hasn't proven easy to sustain. What we see now are increased levels of burnout, fatigue, isolation and decreased mental health and wellbeing among remote

workers. Without clear boundaries, the workday often becomes longer, and the pressure to always be on and available is increasing. Remote work is definitely not for everyone, as not everyone possesses the discipline to set boundaries for themselves or others.

Productivity is about more than merely the output—it's about relationships, engagement, well-being, and connection. In remote environments, people often struggle with time management and motivation, especially without the energy and accountability from being at an office surrounded by colleagues.

For teams who are solving complex problems, the absence of in-person interaction can prevent decision-making and limit knowledge exchange. Consequently, this can reduce both creativity and productivity.

Innovation needs human connection

Innovation rarely happens in isolation, as it's sparked by conversation, built on mutual understanding, and accelerated through spontaneous in-person interactions. This is something that virtual and remote settings struggle to replicate.

Coffee and lunch breaks, informal conversations, and in-person brainstorming sessions create the

conditions for creative thinking, acknowledgement and direct feedback. Face-to-face interaction also enables clearer communication and a more profound sense of connection. Body language and comments in an office can communicate more than any email or video call.

These nuances are crucial to building momentum, trust, and shared purpose—especially in fast-moving or creative industries.

Organisational culture is built through in-person interactions

Culture isn't built through virtual calls or online chat and messages—it's developed through everyday interactions. In-person work helps nurture a sense of belonging, shared values, and team and organisational identity. It also allows mentoring relationships to grow and evolve, and gives newly onboarded team members a stronger sense of the organisation's purpose and DNA.

In fully remote or poorly managed hybrid models, culture risks becoming fragmented and inconsistent. Employees can start feeling disconnected or siloed, and departments may begin to operate independently in isolation. Over time, this can lead to reduced drive and motivation, reduced engagement, and higher turnover.

Of course, remote work provides access to a global and diverse talent pool. However, it also presents challenges when it comes to onboarding new team members and fostering professional development. Career progression often relies on recognition, visibility, mentoring, and learning by example—elements that tend to occur organically in shared physical spaces through knowledge sharing and face-to-face interactions. Remote employees may miss out on informal coaching, networking opportunities, and exposure to senior leaders.

Leadership skills, in particular, are developed through in-person feedback, observation, and collaboration. The physical workplace enables employees to absorb organisational norms, build confidence, and grow into leadership roles in ways that are difficult to replicate in an online environment.

Hybrid work: balance or compromise?

Many organisations are now adopting hybrid models in an attempt to find a balance. While this offers flexibility, it also introduces a new level of complexity. Ensuring fairness and unbiased treatment of remote and on-site employees, maintaining consistent communication, and keeping teams aligned requires thoughtful planning and strong leadership.

Hybrid or remote work isn't a one-size-fits-all solution. Leaders must be clear and intentional about when and why teams come together, ensuring office time is used for collaboration, connection, team and culture-building, not just administration and routine tasks. Without clear purpose, hybrid arrangements risk becoming disjointed and/or ineffective.

Why the office still matters

Ultimately, senior management and leadership are responsible for creating environments where people, associations and organisations can thrive. Remote work has its place, but relying merely on online work is not sustainable. The onsite work and office remain a vital space for innovation, relationships, culture, development, and connection.

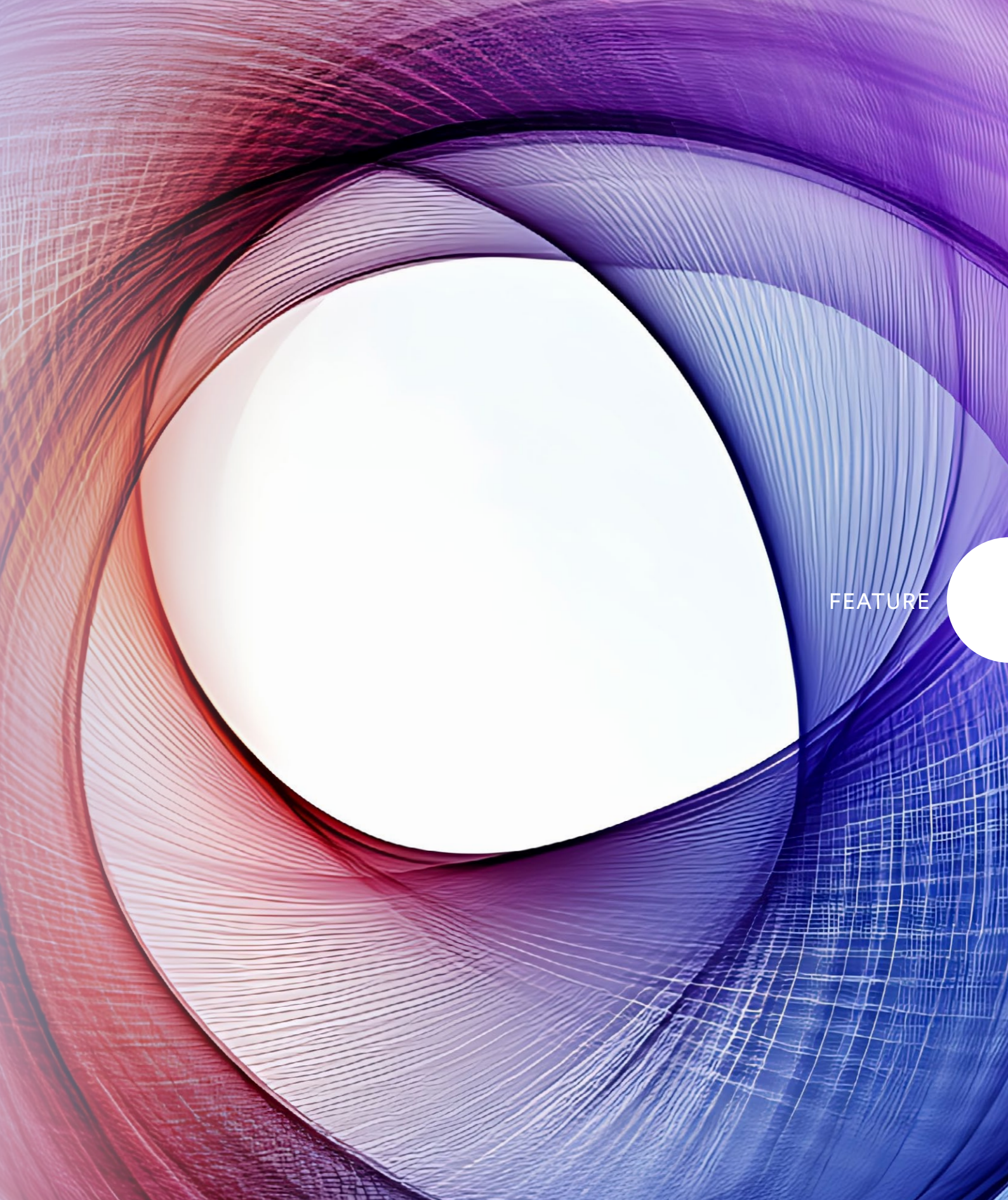
This doesn't mean abandoning flexibility—it means designing work models that bring out the best in people, creating energising and motivating environments where people can perform and thrive. That can include hybrid policies, purposeful in-office days, and a renewed focus on collaboration and mentorship.

What matters is that organisations don't lose sight of what makes them strong and sustainable: shared experiences, collective ambition, and a vibrant, healthy, connected culture.

In the end, the return to the office isn't about dismissing the benefits of remote work. It's about acknowledging that meaningful, in-person interaction plays an essential role in building resilient, creative, and high-performing organisations. The future of work lies not in choosing between home and office, but in integrating the two to create a dynamic, flexible, and people-focused workplace. The office must remain a cornerstone of this new working model—one that supports connection, growth, and innovation.



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FEATURE



FEATURE

Voice, Vision, Impact: The Advocacy Advantage

Effective advocacy has never been more vital for associations seeking to influence change and champion their members' interests. From crafting compelling messages to mobilizing grassroots support, this feature explores the strategies and success stories behind impactful public policy engagement. Whether launching a new initiative or refining existing efforts, associations will find valuable insights into building strong, sustainable advocacy efforts that make a real difference.

By Vicky Koffa

Strategic Approaches for Association Lobbying & Advocacy

Amid major geopolitical shifts and rapidly evolving policy environments, associations are under more pressure than ever to adapt their lobbying and advocacy strategies. The challenges and opportunities are multidimensional, requiring a clear understanding of both local and global dynamics. Yiannis Liaros, Public & Social Affairs Director at Addcase, spoke to Boardroom, sharing valuable insights on how associations can navigate these turbulent waters effectively.

Some clarifications to start with. Lobbying involves direct interactions with lawmakers and officials to influence specific legislation or regulations. It is typically a more formal and structured approach, often involving professional lobbyists with deep expertise in the legislative process. Advocacy, on the other hand, encompasses a broader range of activities aimed at promoting a cause or policy issue. This can include public campaigns, education efforts, and grassroots mobilisation, aiming to shape public opinion and create a favourable environment for policy change.

“The landscape of lobbying and advocacy for associations, particularly in Europe, is more dynamic and complex than ever,” Liaros said. *“With stricter regulations and transparency requirements, associations must engage a wider range of stakeholders and address emerging policy issues such as sustainability and digital regulation.”* The European Parliament elections last year proved the instability of the political environment (with significant shifts in party power and policy priorities) making it imperative for associations to adopt new strategies and create stronger cross-border collaborations.

It is clear that associations can no longer rely on traditional, narrow-focused lobbying tactics. Challenging as such

constant change may sound, it also opens up new avenues for meaningful engagement and impact.

Evolving Strategies

Over the past decade, the sector has evolved from merely convincing the right officials about the importance of a policy to a complex ecosystem where technology and training are now the main ingredients. Liaros highlighted several key changes: *“Lobbying and advocacy have become more professional, with better use of data, increased training, higher standards, and significant support from digital technologies.”*

The increased professionalism in lobbying and advocacy is a response to the growing demands for transparency and accountability. Associations are investing more in data analytics to inform their strategies, allowing for more targeted and effective advocacy efforts. Moreover, the rise of digital platforms has democratised the advocacy space, enabling even smaller associations with limited resources to make their voices heard.

A great example of utilising digital platforms comes from MedTech Europe, who launched a series of award-winning mini documentary-style films produced by BBC StoryWorks.

Each film presents to policymakers and the general public the stories of patients, healthcare professionals, and innovators, providing a profound understanding of the impact and potential of the medical technology sector.

Digital platforms are integral to modern advocacy. According to him, *“they offer a powerful tool to enhance reach and engagement. However, associations must navigate challenges such as information overload and cybersecurity risks. Investing in training and robust security measures is essential to capitalise on digital opportunities.”*

Information overload can dilute messages, making it essential to craft clear, concise communications to achieve effective lobbying and advocacy. *“Set clear objectives, identify key decision-makers, and maintain consistent efforts over time. Building strong coalitions and tailoring messages to specific policymakers’ interests are also vital,”* said Liaros. He stressed the importance of credibility, advocating for the use of data, research reports, and impact studies to bolster arguments. Advocacy is a long-term game, requiring sustained engagement and perseverance.

Adapting to Geopolitical Shifts

Despite these advancements, associations face persistent challenges. *“Agility and responsiveness to political changes are crucial. Brexit is a prime example of how quickly the lobbying environment can shift, disrupting established political and economic relationships,”* Liaros added.

Given the continuous nature of geopolitical changes, associations have to keep up with the current situation in order to create broader coalitions. *“Nationalism and euroscepticism pose threats to cross-border collaboration, but they also present opportunities to strengthen international alliances,”* he said.

A good way to tackle this is developing solid crisis management plans to address potential geopolitical disruptions like trade wars or political instability. Building public support and trust through awareness campaigns is also crucial. The European Chemical Industry Council (Cefic) launched an organic social media campaign to mobilise organisations to reach 1000 signatures on the Antwerp Declaration (a European Industrial Deal to complement the EU Green Deal and safeguard quality jobs in Europe). A customised social media toolkit used by signatories exponentially amplified the campaign, encouraged organisations to sign up, and

made the message a key topic on social media. The effort resulted in a social media reach of 20+ million.

One of the most challenging yet vital aspects of advocacy is building coalitions and maintaining trust. *“Stakeholders often have diverse interests and priorities, making it difficult to bring them together for a long-term cause,”* Liaros noted. *“Effective coalition building requires significant effort in negotiation and consensus building.”*

Building coalitions is not just about aligning interests but also about fostering a sense of shared purpose and mutual trust. This requires ongoing negotiation and a commitment to transparency. By demonstrating accountability and ethical conduct, associations can build stronger, more resilient coalitions capable of driving significant policy changes.

Future Trends

The rise of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) considerations represents a fundamental shift in the advocacy landscape. Associations that embrace these values not only align themselves with broader societal goals but also enhance their credibility and influence. Promoting sustainability and responsible governance can position associations as leaders in their fields, attracting support from both policymakers and the public.

Technology will continue to drive change. *“AI and machine learning can predict policy trends and optimise advocacy strategies, while blockchain can ensure transparency in advocacy efforts by securely tracking interactions and transactions,”* he predicted.

“For instance, this conversation we are having is based on knowledge, experience and ideas, but it took me quite a few hours to put my answers together, while AI could do pretty much the same within a few seconds, by analysing and combining huge amounts of data and information from various sources. AI is already in position to make sentiment analysis, so it can measure or at least predict the emotions and trends of the public or the decision makers with great accuracy. And, of course, this way it can also recommend more targeted and effective advocacy strategies. Virtual reality could also create immersive experiences to educate policymakers and the public on complex issues, making advocacy more compelling.”

As Liaros concluded: *“In this ever-changing environment, it’s not about finding a magic recipe but about continuously adapting and refining your strategies to stay relevant and impactful. Consistent effort is key—advocacy is often a marathon, not a sprint. And don’t forget to celebrate your successes and make them public!”*



Global Advocacy in Action

ICCA CEO **Senthil Gopinath** outlines how strategic advocacy is central to ICCA's global mission—demonstrating the power of business events to drive meaningful change across communities and continents.

ICCA has always been an ardent supporter of the power of advocacy to create tangible change in communities the world over. It's built into our DNA as part of the framework upon which our association is built. Our advocacy policy has evolved over the years, but it's always been about leveraging our influence and voice to form strategic global partnerships and engage with governments, stakeholders, and local communities. For us, this isn't just hyperbole — ICCA walks the talk.

We're committed to advancing — and advocating for — the interests of associations all over the world by providing community, resources, networking opportunities, and educational programmes that create avenues for advancement not found anywhere else. But what does

advocacy look like? How does strategy move from the boardroom to the real world?

For ICCA, it means showing up for our members in the places where decisions get made and changemakers create the policies that shape our industry — and the world. It means being in the rooms where the future is determined. It means forging partnerships and alliances that serve to strengthen our ties with key policymakers and bolster the profile of our industry, demonstrating its value and potential. It's about educational programmes, recognising the achievements of individuals in local communities, and providing a space where everyone in the meetings industry can feel welcomed and represented.

ICCA has crisscrossed the seven continents to promote the value of international business meetings. From the Middle East to Australia to North America, if there is an opportunity to connect with decision makers in government — from the local to the federal level — ICCA is there.

Advancing Advocacy

In Abu Dhabi, at the 63rd ICCA Congress, we partnered with the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers (IAPCO), signing an agreement to promote advocacy in the meetings industry. We joined forces with Arabian Travel Market (ATM), reinforcing our commitment to driving tourism growth through the business events sector in the Middle East and enhancing capacity



to attract large-scale congresses, which contribute to the region's economy and development.

We announced the launch of our ICCASkills Hub in Kigali, supporting the enhancement of global capacity-building, bringing together industry providers and local authorities, and underscoring our commitment to developing talent and strengthening Africa as a leading business events destination.

In South Africa, I met with Hon. Minister of Tourism of South Africa Patricia De Lille to strategise about how ICCA can work with stakeholders in the region to unlock the true potential of the African business and events industry.

In Asia, ICCA was warmly welcomed by the Beijing Municipal Commerce Bureau and the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism, who acknowledged the vital role association conferences play in community development and destination growth. In recognition of this, they invited ICCA to establish a strategic office in Beijing to promote a multidisciplinary, collaborative approach to attracting international business, strengthening the local economy, and further integrating China into the global business events industry.

ICCA also partnered with AIME, a milestone that highlights our commitment to bringing business opportunities to ICCA members in Australia, New Zealand, and Asia. AIME is a strong partner in advocacy, amplifying the voice of the international meetings industry.

In North America, ICCA leaders met with Mexico's Secretary of Tourism, Josefina Rodríguez Zamora, to explore collaborative strategies for strengthening Mexico's position as a business events destination, in partnership with the government department overseeing tourism promotion and development.

Bringing the Power of Meetings to the Global Stage

I was proud to join the Events Industry Council as Chair earlier this year, a role that allows ICCA to gain a larger audience. I was also honoured to represent the business events sector at the UN Tourism Executive Council meeting in Colombia, where I was able to advocate for the business events industry with 35 tourism ministers from every continent. I took part in The Business of Events Global Policy Forum in April, focusing on the opportunity business events can bring to the economy and society of the United Kingdom.

By coordinating efforts with government entities and key policymakers around the world, ICCA embodies and evangelises the true mission of international business events: to bring the transformative power of meetings to communities the world over. To educate and inform decisionmakers about the economic, social, and societal power of our industry. And to provide our members with the best, most innovative, most relevant resources, educational programmes, and opportunities for networking and advancement.

Our advocacy strategy is consistent, but dynamic: it represents our dedication to furthering the interests of our members and the meetings industry as a whole as a vehicle for progress, change, and development. As the world undergoes continuous tumult and upheaval, ICCA's commitment to advocating for the value and potential of our industry remains steadfast, our message is clear, and our dedication to our members is at the forefront of everything we do.

More about ICCA and how your association can benefit from being a member: www.iccaworld.org

Extraordinary is our everyday.



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In the world of convention centres, BCEC proudly stands as a global leader. Consistently voted at the top of world rankings, we have a reputation as the venue where versatility and ingenuity unite to enable the incredible. And, behind all the thrills, frills, and culinary skills is a team of committed, passionate experts ready and eager to make your next big event a truly unforgettable experience.



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By Sarah Markey-Hamm & Toni Brearley

Global Voices, Global Impact: How International Associations Advocate Effectively

As leaders of international and national associations, we've seen firsthand how effective advocacy can elevate an industry, protect member interests, and drive long-lasting change. Whether representing event professionals, medical specialists, or educators, associations must navigate diverse political landscapes, align diverse voices, and create campaigns that resonate both locally and globally.

In our roles—Sarah Markey-Hamm with IAPCO (International Association of Professional Congress Organisers) and Toni Brearley with AuSAE (Australasian Society of Association Executives)—we believe advocacy is not an optional extra. It's a fundamental, strategic responsibility that sits at the heart of every successful professional association. In this piece, we share our insights and practical tips on how to launch an impactful advocacy campaign.

Advocacy helps associations by:

- Influencing policy and regulation
- Securing funding or support for industry programs
- Raising the profile of the profession
- Creating unity and alignment across members

As Toni often says: *"Associations are the voice of their profession or sector. If we don't speak up, who will?"* This ethos is reflected in AuSAE's commitment to equipping association executives with tools, frameworks, and peer networks that make advocacy a core competency—not just something activated during a crisis.

The thought of creating an advocacy initiative can be quite daunting. While developing IAPCO's 'Unlocking Excellence' campaign, the Committee responsible for setting its objectives invested a great deal of time in defining what we hoped to achieve in the short, medium, and long term. Adding to the complexity was the fact that the group behind the effort consisted of volunteers with "real jobs." To keep things moving

forward, the IAPCO Headquarters team and our communications agency played a crucial supporting role throughout the process.

If your association or client is passionate about advocacy but doesn't know where to start, we have compiled a succinct outline with some tips to get your advocacy campaign moving!

Clarify Your Objectives

Ask *"What change are we seeking?"* Is it policy reform, funding, recognition, or regulation? It is important to be specific. The objectives also need to be measurable to ensure that when reporting on the results your board and members can see what has been achieved. An example of this would be to change visitor immigration processes for conference delegates to ensure that maximum attendance is achieved.



Gather Evidence

Policymakers respond to credible data. Use research, economic impact studies, and member insights to build a case. At IAPCO, we regularly use member-driven statistics—like delegate numbers or event output—to communicate industry impact globally.

Tip: Commission independent studies or partner with academic institutions for added credibility.

Build Internal Alignment

Before going public, align internally. Are your board and members on the same page? Advocacy works best when it reflects a shared voice. At AuSAE, we encourage this through regular policy roundtables and strategic working groups and to build a transparent advocacy framework to be shared with members and stakeholders.

Tip: Run a member poll or town hall to surface key issues and build buy-in.

Map Stakeholders & Allies

Create a stakeholder map: Who has influence over your issue? Who are your natural allies? At IAPCO, we have invested in our relationships with our Strategic Partners to strengthen our advocacy reach.

Tip: Think beyond your own sector, engage your customers in the program. Cross-industry coalitions can carry more weight.

Craft a Compelling Narrative

Good advocacy tells a story. Combine human impact with data. Why does this issue matter to society, the economy, or voters? Avoid jargon. Use relatable

language and personalise the message for different audiences.

Tip: Develop a short advocacy toolkit with core messages tailored to government, media, and members.

Choose Your Channels

Advocacy is multi-channel. Direct lobbying, media relations, grassroots campaigns, and social media all play a role. IAPCO's 'Unlocking Excellence' campaign, amplified globally via Global Meetings Industry Day, is a good example of scalable advocacy.

Tip: Design a campaign timeline that includes key milestones and leverages national and global awareness days.

Empower Your Members

Grassroots support is essential and powerful. Your members need to be given the tools to write letters, meet local officials, and share stories. Create templates, explainer videos, and advocacy kits to lower the barrier to entry.

Tip: Nominate Advocacy Champions within regions to lead local efforts. If your campaign is global, consider asking members to translate the key messaging for greater traction.

Measure and Adjust

Track success: policy changes, media coverage, stakeholder engagement, member participation. Report back to your members and adjust your strategy as needed.

Tip: Use surveys and stakeholder interviews to assess what worked and what didn't.

CASE SNAPSHOTS: IAPCO AND AUSAE IN ACTION

IAPCO has developed global advocacy campaigns that showcase the value of certified congress organisers. Our 'Unlocking Excellence' campaign combines accreditation messaging with economic statistics to influence stakeholders across borders.

AuSAE, under Toni's leadership, plays a pivotal role in building advocacy capacity among association leaders. Through policy guidance, networking forums, and executive learning opportunities, we support members in crafting advocacy strategies that resonate and deliver impact.

Final Thoughts: Leadership, Unity, and Action

Advocacy isn't just a communications exercise—it's a leadership function. Associations that embed advocacy into their strategic plan build stronger engagement, shape their external environment, and strengthen their long-term relevance.

As Sarah often says, *"Advocacy is about bringing people with you. Not just to amplify the message, but to co-own the outcome."*

In short: Start with purpose. Speak with one voice. Act with strategy.

Sarah Markey-Hamm is CEO of ICMS Pty Ltd and past President of IAPCO. Toni Brearley is the Chief Executive Officer of the Australasian Society of Association Executives (AuSAE).

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



The Art of Advocacy

Sven Bossu, CEO of AIPC, unpacks the complexities and challenges of advocacy within the meetings industry. Drawing from first-hand experience and real-world examples, he explores why a structured, consistent approach is essential to making the industry's voice heard—especially at the policy level.

Making the case for the event industry is not an easy endeavor. I have been working in this industry for quite some time and my mother still does not understand what I do or what this industry is about—and I assure you it is not a matter of not trying. Having a manifesto in place which allows us to sing from the same hymn page is a great starting place, but much more is needed. Luckily there are some great role models.

These are the numbers

Being based in Brussels, I am fortunate enough to see “advocacy in action” from the first row.

But some figures first.

The European Union
Transparency register is
a database listing
‘interest

representatives’ (organisations, associations, groups and self-employed individuals) who carry out activities to influence the EU policy and decision-making process. There are about 12,000 organisations registered. There are about 50,000 individuals lobbying the EU. And there are more than 1,500 individuals having access to the European parliament.

The cost of lobbying is also staggering. Just as an example: when in 2023 the EU Commission was preparing legislation on the use of data, tech companies ramped up their lobbying investment to 113 million USD. Needless to say, this type of effort is out of reach for AIPC.

A few definitions

However, there are things that we are doing, albeit not on a stand-alone basis. But before going there, it is

perhaps worthwhile to clarify some definitions as there can be some confusion.

Advocacy is about attempting to bring positive change. An example could be educating an elected government official on the positive impact of the event industry. Lobbying is taking it one step further: it involves engaging with policymakers in order to support or oppose certain legislation that impact your organisation. Or putting it differently: asking somebody to vote against or in favour of a legislative proposal.

At EU level, AIPC tries to advocate, in collaboration with the colleagues from other associations such as UFI and ICCA, by providing education and information to policy makers, for example at the IMEX Policy Forum in Frankfurt or during the EU Roundtables in Brussels.

The challenges

The first challenge with advocacy however is timing: you have the biggest influence when policy makers are still in the process of defining the issue as shown on the graph below. The pandemic and the related policy decisions demonstrated that the event industry was not prepared at all and that we came in late in the decision process (in all fairness, we were not the only industry in that position).

The second challenge is that you need to master the four P's in order to advocate efficiently and effectively:

- **Politics:** Understanding the political context and the existing dynamics is key to know when and how to engage with stakeholders.
- **Policy:** Identify the relevant public policies, monitor their developments

and assess the expected impacts on your organisation.

- **Process:** Mastering the decision-making process is essential to identify key milestones, know what coming next, and adapt your advocacy strategy.
- **People:** Advocacy is all about relationships. Your relationships with the people you need to engage with are critical to success.

So, is it impossible for the event industry to do this? Definitely not. But it does require clear objectives, a structure and consistency in messaging and communication.

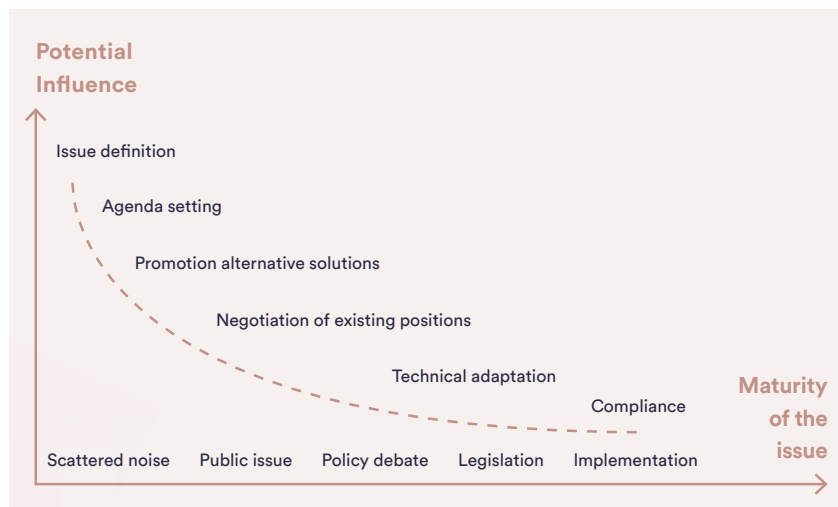
The Canada example

A great example is Meetings Mean Business Canada. This group has a clear set of three priorities: demonstrate

the business events sector's essential contributions to the Canada economy, Improve the travel experience and re-establish Canada among the top international business event destinations. A data collection process is in place, allowing to share up-to-date information. And this dissemination of information is made easy by "ready-to-use" collateral which is available on the website, whether it's infographics, factsheets, videos or social media assets.

In addition, they have put significant effort in mastering the four P's, resulting in structural engagement with policy makers via Parliament Hill Days, including a social event (cocktail) and private meetings with key stakeholders. All this is underpinned by continuous communication with the industry stakeholders, ensuring end-to-end alignment.

Advocacy might seem a bit like the work of Sisyphus, but as the Canadian example demonstrates, it is possible to achieve tangible results and have an impact. It is simply not easy... to say the least.



Sven Bossu is CEO of AIPC, which represents a global network of over 200 leading centres in 55 countries with the active involvement of more than 1000 management-level professionals worldwide. www.aipc.org



By Michael Hickey

Five Ways to Use TikTok for Advocacy

The National Down Syndrome Society leveraged the platform's popularity, built-in tools, and creative spirit to further its cause. Here's how your association can do the same.

Thanks to its tremendous growth, there's a solid argument for associations to lean on TikTok as the next avenue for advocacy. But with such a large user base, how do you stand out on the platform? And what can you do to spread your message beyond your network? The National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS) has found a way to harness TikTok's popularity, generating 4.8 million likes on the platform.

"It has become a big professional tool, and it's been huge for some nonprofits," said Michelle Sagan, digital media manager at NDSS.

Consider these strategies from Sagan to better broadcast your advocacy and awareness efforts on TikTok.

1

1. Lean Into TikTok Trends

Capture the spirit of the moment by incorporating popular trends in your content. Putting a unique spin on the latest craze will probably grab your audience's attention, and could put your post on the Discover page for all to see. In one post, NDSS took advantage of the "Fingers Down" trend to shed light on inequities that the Down syndrome community faces, including the fact that people with Down syndrome can legally be paid below minimum wage. The video went viral, amassing 2.5 million views and more than 620,000 likes.

The organization also capitalized on the trend of creators pointing out everyday things that just don't make sense to them, focusing specifically on laws that negatively affect those with Down syndrome.



"TikTok has become a big professional tool, and it's been huge for some nonprofits."

2

2. Showcase Your Character

TikTok is not the place for canned, dry content featuring senior leadership. Your organization's TikTok videos should feature members of your community speaking authentically to give your message the most impact.

"You see someone with Down syndrome talking about terrible things like, 'I can't get married or I'll lose my benefits just because I have Down syndrome,' and it's these heart-wrenching tidbits that get to people," Sagan said.

Even NDSS, which has a serious mission, have taken advantage of the platform's lighthearted tone to deliver information in a colorful way. Popular TikTok content often features song snippets, lip-syncing, text bubbles, images, or animated backgrounds, so don't forget to incorporate some of these elements.

3

3. Raise Awareness With Built-In Tools

There are several ways that you can drive your audience to take action on TikTok:

- Use donation stickers that send users to your donation page.
- Add a link to petitions or legislation in your bio or video description.
- Use popular hashtags to bring your content to a wider audience.

"Having specific calls to action was more important than getting a lot of likes," Sagan said. Nicole Patton, content creator for NDSS, said one of the organization's videos going viral on TikTok resulted in more than 2,000 new users interacting with its advocacy page on VoterVoice, which the organization linked to on its profile.

4

4. Engage With Your Community

Interacting directly with your audience is another way to mobilize users.

"Nicole, who manages our videos, did a great job at responding to people," Sagan said. "Someone would comment, 'What can I do?,' and she would say, 'Click this action alert to send a note to your member of Congress to pass this bill that we're working on.'"

TikTok's Q&A feature offers another way to keep the conversation going by giving creators an easier way to answer questions in real time during a live video or with a subsequent post.

5

5. Work With TikTok to Create Content

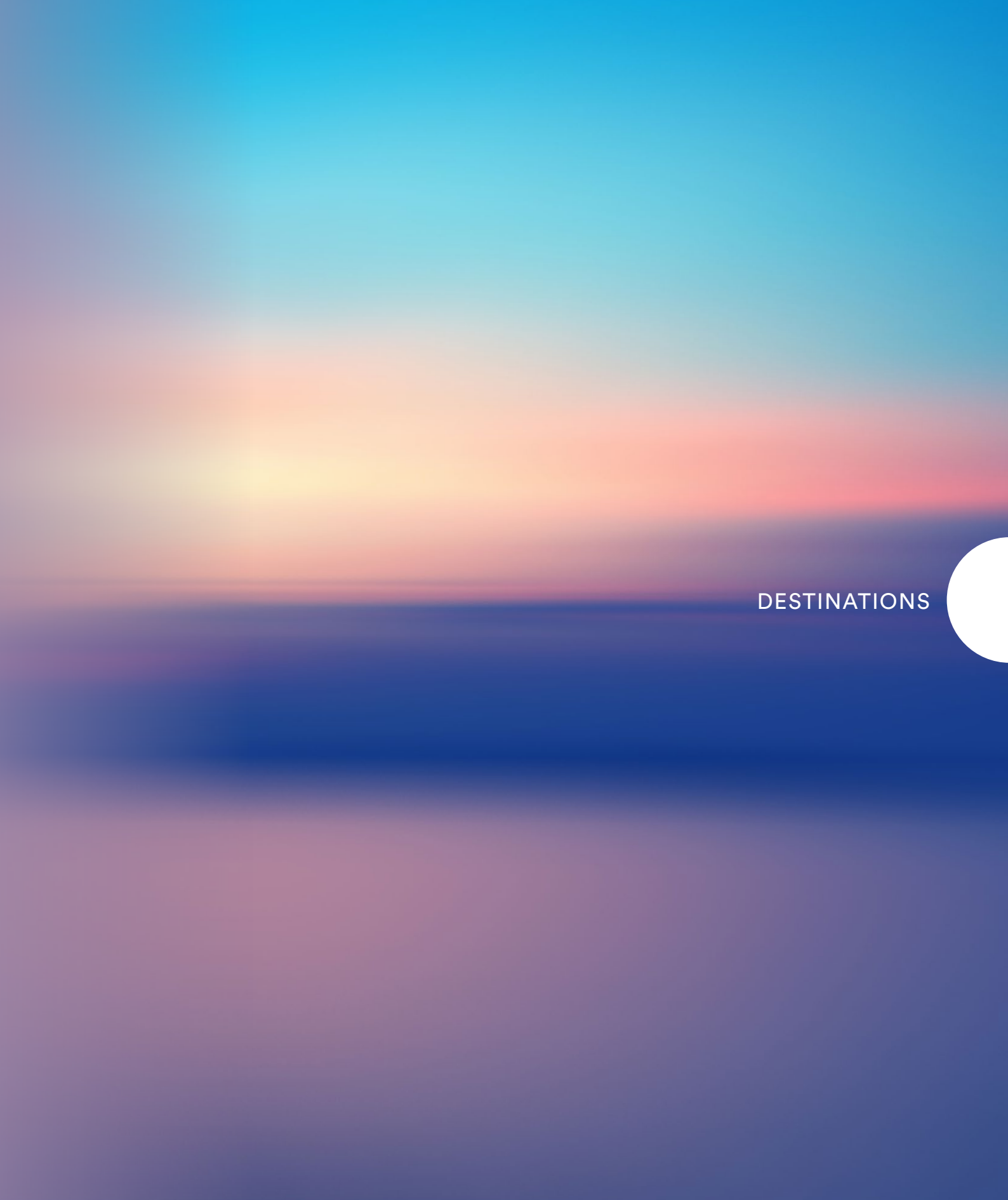
Sagan said she has worked directly with TikTok's growth strategy specialists to schedule live NDSS talks, develop effective content, and use promoted hashtags and analytics to drive awareness.

"We had biweekly meetings with people on their team," Sagan said. "I think TikTok realized that nonprofits were jumping on board, and they were monumental in helping us get going."

This article originally appeared on ASAEcenter.org. Reprinted with permission. Copyright ASAE: The Center for Association Leadership (November, 2021), Washington, DC



The success of
a congress can of
course be measured
by its programme,
but also by how
refreshed, connected,
and inspired
its participants
feel afterwards.



DESTINATIONS

By Vicky Koffa

Antwerp's Living Laboratory for Health Innovation

In the European health innovation landscape, Antwerp distinguishes itself not just through the presence of renowned institutions or the quality of its healthcare infrastructure, but through its ability to structurally enable innovation.

The city's Health & Life Sciences cluster transforms healthcare through an interconnected ecosystem of data, research, industry, and care provision.



Antwerp's strength lies in coordination. Its dense but highly active network of research institutions, clinical centres, startups, and innovation platforms operate within an environment that favours collaboration. This makes Antwerp a hub for scientific advancement and a testbed for real-world e-health solutions.

Health Innovation Powered by Data

A defining characteristic of Antwerp's health cluster is its commitment to data as a strategic asset. The newly launched Antwerp Health Harbour is the region's flagship initiative for integrated health data use. Bringing together the City of Antwerp, the University of Antwerp, ZAS, Helix and the first-line care zones, it co-creates solutions, with a strong focus on social impact and future-proof care.

AHH is all about connectivity, creating an ecosystem where cross-border projects can be developed to improve healthcare and stimulate new technologies. It creates a digital foundation for testing and scaling innovations that span population health, preventive medicine, and personalised care.

A Thriving Research and Clinical Environment

Supporting this data-driven landscape is a network of recognised institutions that bring academic knowledge and clinical excellence to the centre. The University of Antwerp (UAntwerpen) and Antwerp University Hospital (UZA) work in close synergy, enabling the seamless translation of scientific insights into practice. Together, they provide a home for breakthrough research in fields ranging from microbiology to advanced therapy medicinal products (ATMPs), including CAR-T cell therapy and regenerative medicine.

Adding to this is Vaccinopolis, an advanced facility for early-stage vaccine trials. Designed to handle first-in-human studies under strictly controlled conditions, it fills a critical gap in Europe's vaccine development pipeline, ensuring that Antwerp plays a key role not only in medical innovation, but in global health preparedness.

Meanwhile, the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) further strengthens Antwerp's global footprint in health sciences. Renowned for its work on infectious diseases, ITM contributes

© ACB

high-impact research and training that support both local capabilities and international partnerships.

Innovation Rooted in Ecosystem Thinking

Antwerp's approach to health and life sciences is based in the belief that meaningful innovation happens at the intersection of disciplines and sectors. This is reflected in its dense concentration of incubators, spin-offs, and research accelerators, many of which are directly linked to clinical institutions and academic faculties.

From companies like Bytellies and Minze Health to cross-sector platforms such as the Beacon (a collaboration among public and private entities, start-ups, scale-ups, and research institutions) and Dunden Innovation Campus (a community of healthtech startups), the city supports ventures that thrive on multidisciplinary input. The result is an ecosystem capable of nurturing innovation from ideation to commercialisation, backed by public investment, academic validation, and market access.

Further amplifying this is the Port of Antwerp-Bruges (Europe's first GDP-certified seaport for pharmaceutical logistics) ensuring that Antwerp's contribution extends well into the global supply chain for health technologies.

Sleep and Respiratory Care in Focus

Antwerp's clinical strengths are also visible in global gatherings. In 2025, the city hosted the European Sleep and Breathing Conference, a key event in the calendar of the European Sleep Research Society (ESRS). For Professor Wilfried Verbraecken, the conference's local host, Antwerp offers the ideal backdrop for scientific exchange in sleep medicine.

"Antwerp is a dynamic and internationally connected city with a rich academic and



medical tradition," says Verbraecken. "Thanks to the presence of various research institutions such as UAntwerpen and a medical academic centre like UZA, the city provides a stimulating environment for the exchange of scientific knowledge."

This is particularly evident in the field of sleep and respiratory care. *"In this domain, UZA plays a leading role, with a multidisciplinary team dedicated to both fundamental and clinical research. This conference benefits from the strong local expertise that Antwerp has to offer,"* he adds.

Verbraecken also highlights the importance of collaboration. *"Collaborations with institutions like UZA enhance the scientific impact of international conferences by providing access to cutting-edge research, advanced clinical facilities, and a network of experts. Our sleep clinic is one of the largest in Belgium and plays a key role in the diagnosis and treatment of sleep disorders. By bringing together local and international researchers and clinicians, we facilitate knowledge sharing and innovation, contributing to advancing sleep and respiratory medicine beyond borders."*

A Magnet for Medical Congresses

The European Sleep and Breathing Conference is not an isolated example.

Antwerp is set to welcome a host of high-level medical conferences in 2025, including the European Society for Dermatological Research Annual Meeting, the European Conference on Mental Health, and the Snomed International Conference.

Far from being just another host city, Antwerp provides intellectual capital and scientific depth that elevate these events. Organisers benefit not only from modern infrastructure and easy connectivity, but also from the city's embedded research culture and proactive engagement from local institutions.

With over 55,000 students, a multilingual workforce, and proximity to Brussels, Amsterdam, and Paris, Antwerp is both a gateway for life health sciences. It offers international associations and healthcare leaders a base of operations in one of Europe's most connected and forward-looking urban regions.

More info on Antwerp as a conference destination:
antwerpconventionbureau.be

Meet the Bureau's team at IMEX in Frankfurt, Stand E150, from 20 to 22 May.

By Vicky Koffa

Nothing Like Holding An Event In Australia

What makes a destination truly unforgettable for business events? Is it the cutting-edge venues, the knowledge hubs, or the opportunity to create lasting legacies? In Australia, it's all of this - and more. With its bold "There's Nothing Like Australia for Business Events" campaign, the country is making it clear: this is a place where associations shape the future.

From world-class convention centres and government-backed funding through the Business Events Bid Fund Program to a deep commitment to sustainability and innovation, Australia has become the go-to place for global meetings and congresses.

In February, I had the opportunity to experience this firsthand, attending AIME (Asia Pacific Incentives and Meetings Event) in Melbourne, followed by a visit to Brisbane. The trip provided invaluable insights into the new developments shaping Australia's business events industry, bringing the destination closer than ever to associations' needs.

Australia's Competitive Edge in Business Events

The global events industry is more competitive than ever. Countries are competing to attract large-scale conferences and association congresses, each offering compelling incentives. Robin Mack, Executive General Manager of Commercial & Business Events Australia, acknowledges this growing challenge but highlights how Tourism Australia strategically positions the country to cut through the noise: *"We know how competitive the global business events landscape is. Our role is to ensure that decision-makers put Australia on their consideration list. We do this through innovative marketing campaigns, platforms like AIME, and, most importantly, direct support to our cities and venues via the Business Events Bid Fund."*

The Business Events Bid Fund Program, launched in 2018, has been a game-changer. Since its inception, it has secured 164 international events worth more than AUD 1 billion, helping cities across Australia win major association meetings.



Victoria National Library, Melbourne

Among them is the Women Deliver Conference (Melbourne, 2026) and the International Astronautical Congress (Sydney, 2025).

But financial support is only part of the equation. Mack highlights the importance of bringing key decision-makers to Australia to see the country's capabilities first-hand. *"We know that Australia is on many people's bucket lists, but when they experience it firsthand, they rate us even higher on every metric – safety, food, culture, infrastructure. That's why hosting planners and association leaders on familiarisation trips is crucial in converting interest into confirmed events."*

Melissa Brown, CEO of the Australian Business Events Association (ABEA), emphasises the importance of a unified voice for the industry. *"The creation of ABEA in 2023 brought together key organisations under one umbrella, ensuring stronger advocacy for business events in Australia. Our mission is to elevate the industry's voice, ensuring that business events are recognised for their significant economic, social, and knowledge-sharing impact."*

Melbourne, hosts of AIME, demonstrates the country's strengths in securing high-profile conferences. Julia Swanson, CEO of Melbourne Convention Bureau, notes that the city's infrastructure and long-term planning have played a key role in attracting global events. *"Melbourne is geared up for a wide range of collaborative and innovative events. With 114 business events confirmed through 2028, contributing over AUD 613 million to the economy, we continue to see the sector go from strength to strength."*

Leadership in Sustainable Events

Sustainability is no longer just a catch phrase in the meetings industry; it is an essential criterion for many international associations when selecting a host destination. Recognising this, Australia has developed a national sustainability framework that aligns with both federal and state-level



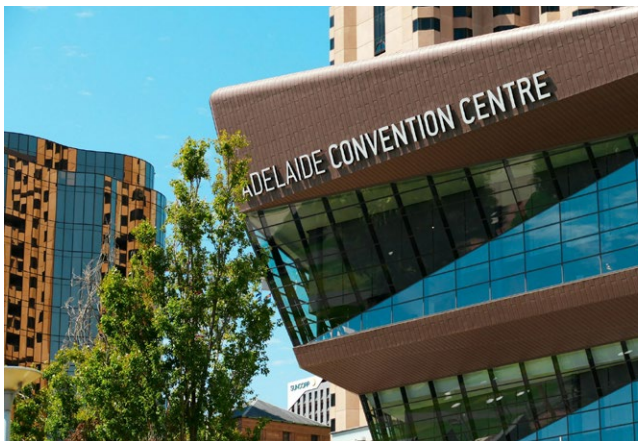
initiatives. This framework includes self-assessment tools for venues and suppliers, accreditation programs such as Ecotourism Australia's "Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard", and strategies for storytelling to showcase Australia's sustainability leadership to the world.

"Sustainability is a key priority for us. Every state and territory in Australia is aligned on this, ensuring that associations looking to host their events here can easily meet their own sustainability goals," says Mack.

One example of this commitment is the Adelaide Convention Centre (ACC), which became the first convention centre globally to achieve EarthCheck Master Certification in 2023. Sarah Goldfinch, General Manager of ACC, has made it clear that sustainability is deeply embedded in the centre's spirit. *"We are not just ticking boxes; we are integrating sustainability into every part of the event experience – from reducing waste and responsible sourcing to energy efficiency. Our goal is to set a benchmark for sustainable events worldwide."*

This mindset is reflected in The Green Print, a four-year Environmental Social Governance (ESG) strategy launched in 2024 by Adelaide Venue Management, which operates the convention centre.





The initiative reinforces ACC's role as a leader in environmentally and socially responsible business events.

Similarly, International Convention & Exhibition Centre (ICC Sydney) has taken an innovative approach to sustainability and community engagement. Under Adam Mather-Brown's leadership, ICC Sydney continues to position itself as *'more than a venue'*, incorporating social sustainability initiatives into its core operations. *"It starts at home,"* Adam explains. *"We prioritise sourcing from Indigenous suppliers, support local industries like winemaking, and drive sustainability initiatives that don't just offset carbon footprints but actually minimise them from the outset."*

In the north, the Darwin Convention Centre was designed with energy efficiency in mind. The Centre's orientation, shape, and integrative design minimise energy consumption, and it actively engages in environmental benchmarking programs to implement sustainable practices across all operations. Additionally, the Centre supports local community programs, including partnerships with Henbury School and Variety – the children's charity, demonstrating a dedication to social responsibility.

New Infrastructure & Expanding Business Hubs

Reinforcing sustainability, Australia is making significant investments in infrastructure to accommodate the growing demand for international business events. Brisbane, for instance, is undergoing a once-in-a-generation development with Queen's Wharf, a multi-billion-dollar project that is transforming the city's business and leisure landscape.

Alison Gardiner, Director of Sales at Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre (BCEC), highlights Brisbane's rapid transformation: *"As a key Olympic venue and stakeholder*

leading into the 2032 Games, BCEC is committed to maximising the opportunities presented by Brisbane's status as an Olympic host city. This event will leave a legacy not just in sports but in the broader business events landscape, driving international investment and enhancing the city's global appeal."

Melbourne, already a major business events hub, has also seen exciting developments. The opening of 1 Hotel Melbourne, with its commitment to sustainable luxury, is a testament to the city's alignment with global expectations for eco-conscious event venues.

Meanwhile, Adelaide is positioning itself as a centre for knowledge and innovation. The city's Innovation Districts, including the Lot Fourteen Precinct, bring together leading research institutions and industries in health, technology, and space, offering associations access to cutting-edge knowledge hubs. *"When an association chooses Adelaide, they know they are entering an ecosystem of innovation that can enrich their conference's agenda and legacy,"* explains Goldfinch.

Sydney continues to enhance its infrastructure to meet growing demand. The upcoming Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport, set to commence operations in 2026, will operate without a curfew, providing international, domestic, and freight services. This development is expected to significantly boost Sydney's accessibility and appeal for global business events.

Legacy & Long-Term Impact of Business Events

One of the key differentiators for Australia as a business events destination is its emphasis on legacy. Unlike many destinations that focus solely on economic impact, Australia actively tracks and nurtures the long-term influence of hosted events.

A prime example is the International Astronautical Congress, held in Adelaide in 2017, which directly led to the establishment of the Australian Space Agency. This year, the event moves to Sydney, further cementing Australia's status in the global space sector.

Similarly, the 2014 AIDS Congress in Melbourne contributed to major health policy developments in Australia and beyond. More recently, the SportAccord World Sport and Business Summit (Gold Coast, 2019) played a crucial role in Australia's successful bid for the 2032 Brisbane Olympics.

"For associations, it's not just about the event itself, but the ripple effect it can create. In Australia, we work closely with event organisers to ensure their conferences leave a meaningful impact – whether it's policy change, industry advancement, or international collaboration," says Mack.

Swanson echoes this sentiment, highlighting Melbourne's commitment to long-term impact. *"Our Positive Impact Guide demonstrates the value of business events not just to the economy, but to trade, investment, and community legacy. Events like the World AIDS Conference in 2014 continue to shape policy and innovation a decade later."*

Brown highlights the role of associations in creating legacies through knowledge-sharing and policy development. *"Business events bring a lot more than dollars; they drive innovation, research, and economic progress. Whether it's the commercialisation of new ideas, breakthroughs in health and technology, or social impact initiatives, our events create meaningful change."*

More information: businesssevents.australia.com

IS IT REALLY THAT FAR?

Despite Australia's appeal, perceived distance and cost can sometimes be concerns for international associations. However, Robin Mack is quick to address this: *"Flight prices have normalised post-pandemic, and with the Australian dollar currently favourable to the Euro, US Dollar, and British Pound, this is the best time for associations to book events here."*

Moreover, once in Australia, event costs are often more competitive than expected. Mack highlights an important distinction: *"Many organisers from North America are used to seeing additional service fees added at checkout. In Australia, the price you see is the price you pay – no surprises."*

Tourism Australia also reports that 37% of business event visitors explore beyond their host city, further maximising the value of their trip and contributing to Australia's broader economy. Sustainable tourism at its best.

Brown expresses the need for ongoing support to maintain Australia's competitiveness. *"Through our advocacy efforts we aim to increase government awareness and support on making Australia competitive to bid for big events. We are actively advocating for a long-term commitment to Tourism Australia's Bid Fund. Extending its scope will provide greater certainty for planners considering Australia for major events a decade from now."*

Tourism Australia's "There's Nothing Like Australia for Business Events" campaign has already driven impressive engagement, with 44 million video views and increased consideration. But as Mack emphasises, the real proof lies in experience. *"We encourage associations to see Australia for themselves – once they do, they understand why there truly is nothing like it."*



Hardy Lagoon,
Whitsundays, QLD.

By Vicky Koffa

Finance and Innovation Intersect in Australia's Fintech Capital, Melbourne

To explore Melbourne's financial services sector means to access a world of technology and innovation, not just nationally but globally. Rising above expectations, fintech matches the city's reputation as a premier business events destination with a mix of deep financial infrastructure, world-class talent, and government-led startup support.



A Financial Base Fuelling a Fintech Future

Melbourne's fintech ecosystem is built on a robust foundation with decades of financial expertise and strategic investment. The city is home to two of Australia's Big Four banks, ANZ and NAB, as well as the country's largest regional institution, Bendigo Bank. Emerging giants like Judo Bank, also headquartered in Melbourne, further reinforce its status as a banking centre.

Melbourne also hosts seven of the ten largest superannuation funds in Australia, playing a central role in managing the nation's retirement savings, and is the headquarters of the Future Fund, Australia's only sovereign wealth fund. The result? Fintech startups have direct access to established institutions, decision-makers and policy influencers from day one.

"Melbourne is the unofficial home of the Australian fintech industry," says Rehan D'Almeida, CEO of FinTech Australia. "Many of our unicorns, including Airwallex and Judo Bank, started in

this city, and many other global fintech organisations have set up shop here too.”

The sector's strength is reflected in its global recognition. Melbourne ranked 32nd in the Global Fintech Index City Rankings and is home to more than 400 fintech startups. These include unicorns such as Airwallex, Afterpay, PEXA, and MYOB, along with rapidly scaling firms like FrankieOne and Verrency. Multinational players including Revolut, Square and Nomis Solutions have also chosen Melbourne as their Australian base.

Startup Momentum

Much of Melbourne's startup strength comes from LaunchVic, the Victorian Government's startup agency. Since 2016, LaunchVic has helped cultivate the startup landscape with targeted programs and smart investment. In 2023, it launched a VC Support Program that's already bringing new funds into Victoria.

Melbourne's startup ecosystem has expanded rapidly, with its total value more than doubling since 2020. Early-stage ventures have also seen strong growth, showing how the city is building momentum. According to the 2024 Global Startup Ecosystem Report, Melbourne ranks 32nd globally and holds the second position in Oceania, while leading the region in both talent retention and founder experience.

Professor Kate Cornick, CEO of LaunchVic, says: *“Our targeted investment in accelerator programs ensures these companies receive the critical support needed at pivotal growth stages, enabling them to scale and achieve their full potential. By enhancing the venture capital landscape, we are strategically attracting more early-stage investors to the state, creating valuable prospects including for fintech startups. These*

actions are shaping the future of Victoria's startup sector, including fintech.”

This boost has not gone unnoticed. Victorian startups continue to attract strong venture capital interest, even during global market fluctuations. One in three founders in Melbourne are women, a figure supported by targeted initiatives such as the Alice Anderson Fund, which backs women-led ventures including Milkdrop and MTime.

Innovation isn't confined to startups, either. Institutions like the RMIT Blockchain Innovation Hub and Monash University are implementing research in real-world applications. Add to that a growing network of innovation precincts, like Melbourne Connect, Cremorne Digital Hub and Fishermans Bend, and you get an ecosystem that knows how to grow ideas.

“LaunchVic plays a pivotal role in advocating for and raising awareness of the Victorian startup ecosystem,” Cornick adds. *“Through targeted campaigns, we showcase the globally competitive companies emerging here, while creating programs that support startups to grow, scale and access capital. We work closely with the Victorian government to highlight companies with global potential and partner with international startup research agencies like Startup Genome and Dealroom.co to ensure Melbourne is consistently benchmarked in global ecosystem reports, reinforcing its position as a rapidly growing startup hub.”*

FinTech Australia's Pillars of Growth

FinTech Australia plays a key role in scaling Melbourne-based companies through trade missions, policy advocacy and industry community building. *“First, we help founders with laying the groundwork for international expansion primarily through trade missions,”* says D'Almeida. *“We also use them as a means to investigate countries*

on behalf of our members, as some may only be suited to certain types of fintech.”

Australia's regulatory environment supports this forward strategy. Initiatives like ASIC's Enhanced Regulatory Sandbox allow fintechs to test services for up to 24 months without a financial or credit licence. Strategic international partnerships (such as the UK-Australia and Singapore-Australia FinTech Bridges) enable Melbourne startups to access new markets more efficiently.

Policy certainty is another major focus. *“We provide a single unified policy voice for the community in an industry that relies heavily on policy work. We help policymakers understand how their decisions can fuel the fintech industry and therefore create more jobs within the ecosystem,”* D'Almeida adds.

Events are central to this growth, too. *“Our flagship conference, Intersekt, and major awards, The Finnies, create partnership opportunities for the community,”* he says. Held annually in Melbourne since 2016, Intersekt is the largest gathering of Australian fintechs, regulators, and investors, attracting upwards of 1,200 delegates and driving key connections across the finance value chain.

Melbourne's fintech rise isn't a coincidence. It's the result of consistent investment, collaborative leadership and an ecosystem that knows how to move fast without losing its footing.

Find out how Melbourne Convention Bureau can help you to create impactful business events : www.melbournecb.com.au

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Northern Territory Congress Shines a Light on Local Expertise

The 10th World Melioidosis Congress (WMC) staged in Australia's Northern Territory (NT) in October 2024 brought an international focus to the exceptional work undertaken by Australia's Menzies School of Health Research, which is headquartered in Darwin, the NT's tropical capital city. Under the theme 'Unity in Diversity: Global Partnerships in Melioidosis', the three-day event convened leading experts, researchers, policymakers, and stakeholders from around the world to advance collaboration in the fight against melioidosis.

Darwin an ideal fit

With melioidosis a potentially fatal infectious disease primarily found in tropical regions globally, WMC is usually held in melioidosis endemic regions, which include the NT's vast tropical areas.

Darwin is home to the world-renowned Menzies School of Health Research, the official congress host, which has dedicated 35 years to specialist melioidosis research. It is also a leading global tropical medical institute dedicated to improving the health and well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Darwin's close proximity to key Asian aviation hubs in Indonesia and Singapore as well as connectivity to many Australian capital city and regional airports enabled the city to offer a strategic location for delegates from across Australia, Asia and further afield.

NT expertise on show

WMC was staged at the Darwin Convention Centre, which organisers described as a "world-class location" at the expansive Darwin Waterfront Precinct, with a range of accommodation options available.

The program featured plenary sessions, workshops and poster presentations, with some delegates visiting Menzies

School of Health Research to learn more about the invaluable work it undertakes.

The social program included an official Welcome Reception, hosted by the NT Government and held at Parliament House and also a Congress Gala Dinner staged at the nearby Mindil Beach Casino Resort which provided stunning over-water sunset views.

Ancient culture enhances Congress

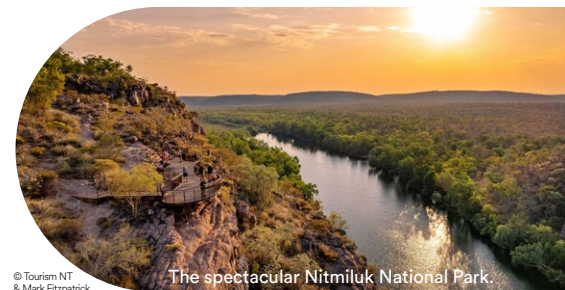
The Organising Committee sought to maximise delegate engagement with the NT's 65,000-year-old Aboriginal culture, including the congress logo which was designed by a local Aboriginal artist.

An Aboriginal Smoking Ceremony was conducted by Larrakia Nation, Traditional Owners of the Darwin region, and a Welcome to Country was delivered at the opening session. Delegates also participated in a Larrakia Saltwater Ceremony in the Darwin Waterfront Lagoon, just a short walk from the convention centre.

Delegate feedback noted these cultural connections as being amongst the many unique and meaningful congress highlights.

Congress "best yet"

Many delegates extended their stay in the NT for a week in order to explore the nearby Nitmiluk, Litchfield and Kakadu National Parks.



© Tourism NT
& Mark Fitzpatrick

The opportunity to reconnect with leading experts and researchers from around the world in a friendly and engaging setting led many delegates to declare the Congress the "best yet."

Congress Convenor, Professor Mark Mayo from the Menzies School of Health Research said: *"Hosting the 10th World Melioidosis Congress in Darwin exceeded expectations. National and international delegates from across 23 countries engaged in meaningful conversations, expert learnings and discussions about collaborations that will improve outcomes globally. Delegates thoroughly enjoyed themselves and took advantage of the incredible tourist opportunities that Darwin and the greater Northern Territory provided."*

For more information
on NT as a conference
destination, scan
this QR code:



By Remi Deve

Estrel Tower: A Vertical Leap for Berlin's Meetings Industry

When it opens its doors in summer 2026, the Estrel Tower will not only redefine Berlin's skyline—it will also mark a turning point in how large-scale urban developments address sustainability, design, and the evolving demands of the meetings industry. Rising to 176 metres with 45 floors, it is set to become Germany's tallest hotel building and an emblem of transformation for the capital's southern district of Neukölln.

Yet the Tower is more than a new architectural landmark; it is the next chapter in a story that began three decades ago with the original Estrel Berlin.

Since its founding more than 30 years ago, the Estrel has grown to become Europe's largest hotel, congress, and entertainment complex. Its significance for Berlin's economy and its reputation as a major meetings destination is well established—something even Berlin's political leadership acknowledges. *"With the Estrel Tower, not only Berlin's skyline is growing—our position as a leading European congress and convention destination is being strengthened even further,"* said Franziska Giffey, Berlin's Senator for Economy, Energy and Enterprise, at the Tower's topping-out ceremony in March 2025.

Reimagining the Future of Events

The Estrel Tower has been designed to meet the growing need for adaptable, hybrid-ready spaces that foster co-creation, creativity, and collaboration. Its mixed-use concept reflects a significant shift in how events are conceived: no longer as isolated moments, but as part of an immersive experience. From its light-flooded atrium to coworking lounges, rooftop bars, and panoramic event spaces, the building aims to integrate work, rest, and networking.

Set across 3,800 square metres of event space and 9,300 square metres of coworking areas, the Tower will feature flexible meeting zones across several floors, including the Sky Floors on levels 41 and 42. These high-altitude spaces offer over 1,200 square metres of meeting and hospitality areas, topped off with a spectacular 43rd-floor restaurant and bar overlooking Berlin's cityscape. There will also be 522 designer rooms, suites, and serviced apartments.

The building is physically connected to the original Estrel Hotel and Congress Center via a tunnel, ensuring continuity of service, logistics, and operations—a practical move, but one that also signals a seamless extension of legacy.

Designing for Sustainability at Scale

But perhaps the most ambitious aspect of the Estrel Tower lies in its environmental credentials. From the outset, the project has aimed to attain LEED Platinum certification, the highest standard in the globally recognized Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design framework.

"The special dimension of sustainability that we want for the tower has taken us a little more time," said Clemens Planck, Head of Construction at Estrel Tower. *"Only by carefully implementing the 45 criteria in numerous categories can we achieve the highest level of certification".*

To reach that level, the team has had to go far beyond energy-efficient lighting and water-saving systems. Materials were scrutinised down to the adhesives and sealants; only products meeting stringent VOC (volatile organic compound) emission thresholds could be used. Wood must be PEFC or FSC certified, and construction waste management, air quality monitoring, and even daylight modelling are all part of the compliance matrix.

In explaining the choice to pursue LEED rather than Germany's domestic DGNB certification, Estrel's sustainability team points to the global recognition of the former. *"With this new Tower, we wanted to make a statement—not just locally, but internationally,"* notes the project's internal documentation.

The architectural design by Barkow Leibinger reinforces the Tower's environmental goals with a façade adapted to the

solar orientation of each side. *“With its shimmering façade, the Estrel Tower is already an integral part of Berlin’s skyline. It’s very present in the city, visible from many places—a new landmark,”* said architect Frank Barkow.

A Signal for Berlin—and Beyond

Berlin’s image as a capital of creativity and experimentation finds a new expression in the Estrel Tower. While the city has no shortage of cultural venues, what it has often lacked is integrated, scalable infrastructure for events that matches its ambition as a business destination. The Estrel Tower addresses that gap directly.

The building is also a sign of Neukölln’s continued development. Once overlooked in the Berlin urban narrative, the district now finds itself at the centre of a reimagined future. District Mayor Martin Hikel called the Tower *“a major step for Neukölln’s development and future potential”*.

At its core, the Estrel Tower exemplifies how legacy institutions can reinvent themselves without losing sight of what made them relevant in the first place. For Berlin—and for the wider meetings industry—it stands as a vertical statement of intent: future-ready, design-led, and unapologetically ambitious.

Contact & Info : Heike Mahmoud, COO Estrel Berlin
h.mahmoud@estrel.com / estreltower.com

ESTREL TOWER AT A GLANCE

- Opening scheduled for summer 2026
- Height: 176 metres – Berlin’s tallest building
- # of Floors: 45
- 522 hotel rooms, including 7 loft suites (up to 240 m²) and 90 serviced apartments
- Event Space: 3,800 m² total, including Sky Floors (41–42), with 1,200 m² premium meeting & dining space, and Estrel Forum (1,000 m² with a 500 m² foyer)
- Coworking Space: 9,300 m²
- Sustainability: Aiming for LEED Platinum Certification
- Parking: 389 car spaces, including 60 e-charging stations for cars and 120 for e-bikes
- Restaurant & Sky Bar: on 43rd and 44th floor, with panoramic views of Berlin



© Render kitchen

Estrel Berlin

By Remi Deve

Barcelona's New Legacy Vision

When Barcelona launched its new Convention Bureau Legacy Program in early 2025, it marked more than just an operational update—it signalled a shift in how the city sees its role as a host of international congresses. Long recognised for its hospitality, culture, and strategic position within Europe's business events landscape, Barcelona is now working to embed long-term societal value into the very fabric of the events it attracts.

"The point is to generate an impact that has a lasting effect beyond the event itself," explained Christoph Tessmar, Director of the Barcelona Convention Bureau (BCB). *"It's about sharing knowledge, building professional connections, and driving scientific and technological advancements within the broader context of the city's economic development."*

To make this vision tangible, BCB has set up a dedicated Legacy Team, tasked with designing and delivering legacy projects in close collaboration with associations, local stakeholders, and civil society. The initiative's early projects are focused on medical and health-related congresses—sectors where Barcelona is already strong. Among them, the ESGE Days 2025, organised by the European Society of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy, stands out as a blueprint for what the Legacy Program aims to achieve.

From Screening Data to Social Action

The ESGE Days 2025 Legacy Project, developed in partnership with the Spanish Association Against Cancer (AECC), focuses on a pressing yet often overlooked public health issue in Catalonia: low participation in colorectal cancer screening programmes among eligible populations.

Although Catalonia's public health system offers free colorectal cancer screening for citizens aged 50 to 69, uptake remains worrying—particularly in certain neighbourhoods of Barcelona. The Legacy Committee, comprising representatives from ESGE, AECC, BCB, and other local partners identified this gap and set out to address it through targeted, community-based interventions.

In short, it's all about creating a collaborative model that brings science, healthcare, and community actors together to drive change where it's most needed, as a representative of AECC stated: *"Such a project is more than just having an information desk or developing an action in the congress, this is a way to share what is discussed within the congress in terms of research and scientific knowledge, and to bring it to the community. And in terms of a social cause, for us as an NGO, it is very important because you can talk about how research affects people – in this case the screening of colon cancer."*

A Multi-Faceted, Community-Centred Approach

The ESGE Legacy Project comprised a series of actions targeting awareness, education, and inclusion. On March

29, an information stand was set up at Mercat del Besòs, a public market located in one of the neighbourhoods with the lowest screening participation rates. Volunteers from AECC and the local screening office distributed materials, explained how the test works, and encouraged community members to participate.

The project also included a youth outreach component, with a session on healthy habits on April 3 at a local high school. Led by ESGE's Young Endoscopists Team, this interactive class aimed to instil preventative health knowledge in teenagers while introducing them to careers in healthcare. *"We want the material to stay in the school and be reused,"* the organisers noted, emphasising the long-term educational value.

Another striking feature is its inclusivity. A partnership with Assís, a local homeless centre, brought colorectal cancer screening information—and access to testing—directly to one of the city's most marginalised populations. *"This group is often left out simply because they don't have a fixed address to receive the invitation letter,"* one local organiser explained. *"By working with a nearby pharmacy and support staff, we aimed to change that."*



Finally, the congress itself served as a platform for advocacy. A dedicated slot on ESGE's Spotlight Stage was reserved for the AECC to discuss the 25th anniversary of the screening programme and the objectives of the legacy project.

Ian M. Gralnek, ESGE President, commented: *"We were really happy to bring our 5,000 delegates to Barcelona. But we also wanted to leave something behind. So, we did a legacy project around colorectal cancer and colorectal cancer screening. We wanted to raise awareness within the public at large in the Barcelona area and the community, and try to leave a positive footprint when all of our delegates go back home."*

Evaluating Long-Term Impact

While many congress legacy efforts remain largely symbolic, the Barcelona Convention Bureau's model aims for something more structured and measurable. According to BCB, the legacy process can begin at least 12 months before the event, aligning each project with local needs and stakeholders. With this in mind, they created a Legacy Handbook outlining the process, and a Legacy Committee can be established for each project, bringing together association leaders, local institutions, and community partners. The impact is then assessed at

least a year after implementation, with a communication plan ensuring visibility.

With more than 500 congresses hosted annually, Barcelona's potential to lead in legacy planning is significant. ESGE Days 2025 is just the beginning. Upcoming projects include collaborations with the World Stroke Congress and ECTRIMS, for the leading European MS conference, each with their own focus but underpinned by the same mission: to ensure that the city benefits not just economically, but socially and scientifically, from its role as a global congress hub.

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

By Remi Deve

How Dijon is Reinventing Itself

Once the seat of the Dukes of Burgundy, Dijon, France, has long been associated with heritage, gastronomy, and wine. But in recent years, this mid-sized French city—located less than two hours from Paris by high-speed train—has begun carving out a new identity, one rooted not only in its past but in forward-looking urban innovation, sustainability, and knowledge exchange. In doing so, it has quietly become an increasingly attractive destination for congresses of varying formats and sizes.

Situated at the intersection of the Paris-Lyon-Strasbourg corridor in Burgundy and well-connected by high-speed rail, Dijon is reclaiming its place as a node of influence—not through grand gestures, but through precise, purposeful planning. From deep-rooted research networks to emerging green industries, the city is demonstrating that excellence and international engagement need not be confined to metropolises.

“We must go one step further, together, to unveil our region’s soul while championing its achievements and bold, innovative projects,” says François Rebsamen, Minister of Regional

Planning and President of Greater Dijon. That ambition is increasingly visible in how Dijon approaches urban strategy—not merely through infrastructure, but by aligning innovation ecosystems, academic leadership, and community well-being.

A Smart City With Substance

Dijon may not be the first city to label itself “smart,” but it was the first in Europe to integrate all urban infrastructure management—transport, lighting, waste, and public safety—into a single digital control platform. ON Dijon, launched in 2019, has been hailed as a model of efficiency and sustainability, using real-time data to manage resources and reduce environmental impact.

In parallel, the city is advancing its decarbonisation agenda with projects like the Response initiative, which is turning entire neighbourhoods into positive-energy districts. Hydrogen-powered buses, extensive solar infrastructure, and biomethane injection into heating networks mark the city’s transition from aspiration to implementation.

These efforts haven’t gone unnoticed. Dijon has become one of the 100 European cities selected for the EU’s “climate-neutral and smart cities” mission—a validation of its commitment to building urban systems fit for the 21st century.

At the Crossroads of Health, Food & the Environment

While the smart city project garners headlines, Dijon’s quieter transformation is taking place across its research institutions and innovation clusters. With more than 30 laboratories and nearly 100 researchers ranked among the top 2% worldwide, the Burgundy capital has emerged as a hub in fields such as health, agri-food and digital technology.

Institutions like the Centre for Taste and Feeding Behavior and the Institut Agro Dijon exemplify how traditional



© Vargas

sectors like gastronomy, wine and agriculture are being reimagined through interdisciplinary research. *“Dijon is not just preserving its culinary heritage—it’s turning it into a living laboratory for the future of food,”* says Patrick Genie, Manager of the Dijon Convention Bureau. *“It might even be one of our best-kept secrets the world should know about.”*

The health sciences ecosystem is equally dynamic. Companies such as Urgo, Crossject, and Proteor drive innovation in medical devices and biopharma, supported by a strong academic network and one of France’s leading university hospitals. Recent breakthroughs include needle-free auto-injectors and artificial skin technologies—evidence of a region with the capacity to not just host medical congresses, but contribute meaningfully to their content.

Knowledge Embedded in Place

What sets Dijon apart from other congress destinations isn’t just its infrastructure, but its ability to offer a coherent narrative of innovation grounded in place. It is home to multiple competitiveness clusters, including Vitagora (focused on food innovation), Santenov (health and medtech), and AgrOnov (agroecology), each offering pathways for collaboration between visiting professionals and local researchers.

In this way, hosting a congress in Dijon offers more than access to modern venues and good transport—it enables deep engagement with existing ecosystems of knowledge. This is particularly relevant at a time when event organisers are seeking to maximise the legacy and societal impact of their meetings.

The city’s venues support this ambition. The Dijon Exhibition and Convention Center, located just eight minutes from the TGV station by tramway and adjacent to nearly 1,000 hotel rooms, features 20 rooms accommodating from 30 to 600 seats, 5 exhibition halls, and a neighboring 1,600



seat auditorium. It recently hosted the 11th Regional Hydrogen Days, where over 800 delegates gathered to discuss the topic of “decarbonization and reindustrialization”.

Let’s also mention the International City of Gastronomy and Wine, inaugurated in 2022—a one-of-a-kind culinary hub in France and Europe. Spanning over 6,000 square metres, it offers an immersive journey into food culture through chef-led masterclasses, interactive exhibitions, grand cru tastings, a dedicated gastronomic village, diverse dining options, and even a cinema.

Rethinking Value

As congresses increasingly look for destinations that balance accessibility, affordability, and authenticity, Dijon offers a compelling mix. With 5,000 hotel rooms in Greater Dijon, excellent rail connections in Burgundy and beyond, and a vibrant cultural calendar that includes everything from the International Food Fair to new contemporary music festivals, the city audaciously positions itself as both professional and personal.

Yet what truly distinguishes Dijon is its willingness to rethink the role of the host city itself—not simply as a backdrop for events, but as an active participant in shaping them. Whether it’s providing access to research networks, creating opportunities for policy dialogue, or connecting visiting associations with local stakeholders, the city sees each congress as an opportunity for reciprocal exchange.

As François Rebsamen puts it, *“Dijon combines the strengths of a major city with the charm of an authentic French town, a capital for living well, enjoying epicurean delights, and a trailblazer for innovation, unmatched among similar-sized cities.”*

More information:
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By Vicky Koffa

Geneva's Local Answer to Global Responsible Event-Organising Expectations

Geneva has long been synonymous with diplomacy, international cooperation, and innovation. Now, it's adding another notch to its belt with sustainable and inclusive event planning. The Geneva Tourism & Conventions Foundation (GTCF) has recently launched a new guide designed to help event organisers align their events with the destination's environmental and social ambitions.

Built in consultation with Geneva's diverse event industry ecosystem, the guide is practical, accessible, and rooted in local expertise. It doesn't attempt to reinvent sustainability, but it does bridge the gap between high ambitions and on-the-ground implementation.

Responding to a Growing Need

This guide wasn't created in a vacuum. After years of experience collaborating with associations and event organisers, a recurring theme emerged leading to the creation of the guide: the desire to make events more responsible, and the challenge of knowing where to start.

"Over the years, the Geneva Convention Bureau has collaborated closely with associations to organise their conferences and congresses," explains Alain Pittet, Director of the Geneva Convention Bureau. "Through this ongoing partnership, we've recognised a significant need from our clients regarding sustainability. Geneva is home to a multitude of local stakeholders and sustainability initiatives, yet event organisers often struggle to identify

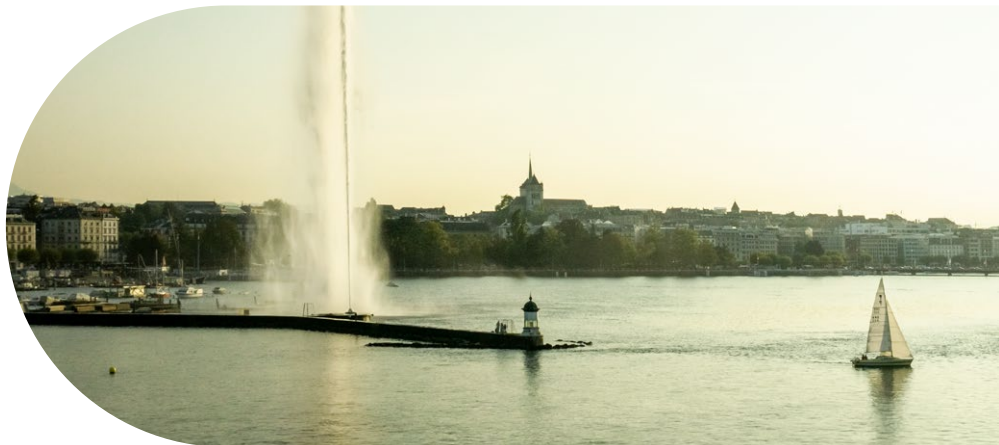
the appropriate solutions and contact the right people to support their sustainability goals."

In response, the Geneva Convention Bureau took on the role of facilitator, connecting organisers with the region's sustainability ecosystem. *"Our role is to open the doors to the destination enabling congress organisers to leverage local expertise and implement impactful, environmentally conscious practices throughout their events,"* Pittet adds. *"We created this guide to serve this purpose."*

From Complexity to Clarity

Organising a conference is a complex endeavour. Between sourcing venues, negotiating with suppliers, and managing logistics, sustainability often ends up slipping down the priority list. This is where the guide hopes to make a difference.

"We aim for this guide to serve as a valuable resource, facilitating the adoption of sustainable practices among congress organisers," says Laura Alonso Huarte, Sustainability Project Manager at the



GTCF. *“By providing clear, actionable advice, we hope to make sustainable event management accessible and approachable.”*

Rather than prescribing a rigid framework, the guide offers concrete ideas. *“It serves as a source of inspiration for event planners to explore sustainable solutions tailored to their unique needs and preferences. Our objective is to empower associations to easily integrate sustainability measures into their congress planning and execution,”* Alonso Huarte continues.

What's Inside the Guide?

The guide is comprehensive, yet focused. It doesn't stick to theoretical solutions, but instead offers a design for planners to use when navigating real-world challenges. It's structured around nine key themes: Destination, Food, Waste Management, Transport, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), Impact/Legacy, Governance, Venues & Hotels, and Communication.

Each section offers:

- A brief introduction to the topic
- Local insights and “Did you know?” facts about Geneva
- A curated list of relevant service providers
- Concrete actions and measures
- A practical checklist for implementation

On an environmental level, the guide encourages organisers to prioritise local and seasonal catering, reduce single-use

materials, and promote Geneva's excellent public transport options, including the complimentary Geneva Transport Card for overnight guests. Even everyday decisions, like offering vegetarian meals by default or renting reusable tableware, are framed as opportunities to drive positive change.



Inclusion And Legacy Matter Too

With the realisation that sustainability is more than carbon footprints, the guide recognises the importance of social sustainability through its focus on DEI. The City of Geneva has taken strong steps in this area, from gender equity policies and anti-sexism initiatives to accessibility improvements and support for LGBTIQ+ inclusion.

The guide includes suggestions for ensuring events are accessible to all – physically, socially, and culturally. Whether that means providing sign language interpreters, accessible venues, or prayer rooms, the message is clear: everyone should feel welcome in Geneva. Events can, and should, leave a positive legacy. The guide encourages organisers to think beyond their event dates; to consider how they might benefit the local community, environment, or economy over the long term. Examples range from partnering with local NGOs and running public workshops, to organising team-building activities with a social or environmental focus.

The goal is to transform good intentions into measurable impact.

Geneva's Broader Commitment

Although it's a new initiative, the guide doesn't stand alone in the sustainability journey. It's part of a wider strategy embedded in Geneva's identity. Switzerland has committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, and the Canton of Geneva has set its own ambitious target: a 60% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 1990 levels.

Looking at the bigger picture, Geneva Tourism's involvement moves past empty words. The Foundation is part of the Swisstainable programme, scoring “Engaged” status, and participates annually in the Global Destination Sustainability Index, where it ranked 46th globally in 2024.

And Geneva walks the talk. From green-powered venues such as the CIGG and Palexpo, to the innovative GeniLac system that uses water from Lake Geneva for sustainable heating and cooling, all powered by 100% renewable electricity, the destination has built the infrastructure needed to host responsible events.

Geneva's approach to sustainability is practical and informed. The new guide ensures that events held there receive beforehand everything they need to be sustainable. *“As a destination, we believe it's our responsibility to reduce barriers and support the event industry in becoming more sustainable and inclusive,”* says Alonso Huarte. *“Sustainability becomes a far more attainable goal when organisers understand the specific steps they can take.”*

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By Remi Deve

Living Well, Meeting Better in Zurich

When Mercer released its 2024 Quality of Living City Ranking, Zurich once again emerged at the top. For those familiar with the city, this came as no surprise. Zurich's blend of pristine public spaces, efficient infrastructure, low crime rates, and cultural sophistication makes it not only an enviable place to live, but also a compelling destination for international congresses. What's less often discussed, however, is how these same qualities—the ones that draw expatriates and global talent—also create the ideal conditions for hosting meaningful, impactful events.

As cities increasingly compete to attract not only businesses but also ideas, expertise, and global networks, Zurich stands out by offering both exceptional quality of life and a vibrant environment for knowledge exchange. This is

important because today's congresses are no longer just about delivering presentations—they're about creating meaningful connections. In this context, the city itself becomes a key stakeholder in the success of an event.

The Role of Urban Well-Being

For decades, event planners have focused on accessibility, venue capacity, and cost. These are, of course, non-negotiables. But as the meetings industry evolves, so do its priorities. Organisers are increasingly seeking destinations that align with broader values: well-being, sustainability, inclusiveness, and long-term societal impact. Zurich's top ranking in Mercer's report is not simply about comfort—it reflects a deep alignment with these evolving expectations.

Take safety, for instance. A low-crime environment doesn't just reassure attendees; it creates the kind of relaxed, open atmosphere that fosters informal networking and spontaneous idea-sharing. Public transportation in Zurich is not only reliable—it's an experience in efficiency that ensures attendees can focus on the content of a conference rather than the stress of navigating an unfamiliar city.





© Zurich Tourismus



Kongresshaus Zürich.

© Zurich Tourismus

The city's compactness is another asset: in Zurich, there's no need to plan for hour-long transfers between hotels, a carbon-conscious Zurich Convention Center, and dinner spots. Everything is within easy reach, promoting a seamless flow of activities and serendipitous meetings.

A High-Functioning Innovation Ecosystem

Beyond lifestyle perks, Zurich is also embedded in one of Europe's most dynamic knowledge economies. The Greater Zurich Area boasts a higher density of big tech companies than Silicon Valley itself—home to major operations for Google, Microsoft, Apple, and IBM, to name a few. The city's thriving innovation scene is anchored by institutions like ETH Zurich, one of the world's top technical universities, which serves as a magnet for international talent and a driver of cutting-edge research.

This ecosystem actively informs the congress experience. Events hosted in Zurich naturally tap into a dense network of academic, corporate, and startup communities, enriching the content and expanding the reach of knowledge shared. It's not uncommon for congresses held in Zurich to feature keynote speakers who work at the bleeding edge of AI, biotech, or green tech—many of whom live or

work just down the street from the convention centre.

Zurich's leadership in innovation is complemented by a growing commitment to human-centred design in urban policy and public life. This ethos is captured by events like Open-i, an open innovation platform that brings together academia, business, and government to tackle complex social and environmental challenges.

Congresses as an Extension of Quality of Life

So how does all of this translate into the actual congress experience?

It's about more than just the setting. When delegates arrive in Zurich, they're not just attending a conference—they're stepping into a city that embodies many of the values their own organisations aspire to: efficiency, openness, sustainability, and innovation.

During breaks between sessions, attendees can find respite along the shores of Lake Zurich or take a 10-minute tram to explore the city's museums and galleries.

In the evenings, networking doesn't

have to feel forced when it happens over dinner in a historic restaurant or during a boat cruise with Alpine views. Even culinary experiences—ranging from traditional Swiss fare to internationally acclaimed fine dining—speak to a culture of quality and attention to detail.

The Zurich Model

If Zurich sets a standard, it's because it's positioned itself as an active contributor to the intellectual and emotional outcomes of a congress.

The model Zurich offers—where city infrastructure, innovation ecosystems, and lifestyle converge—provides a glimpse of what the future of international meetings should be. In a time when audiences are more discerning, budgets are scrutinised, and expectations are high, it's no longer enough for a city to be functional. It must inspire.

The success of a congress can of course be measured by its programme, but also by how refreshed, connected, and inspired its participants feel afterwards. In this regard, Zurich isn't just a good choice—it's a blueprint.

More info on how Zurich Convention Bureau can help you organise conferences: [zuerich.com/mice](https://www.zuerich.com/mice)

More info on Switzerland as a convention destination:

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STRASBOURG
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By Remi Deve

Strasbourg Steps Forward

Long known as a symbolic heart of Europe, Strasbourg has emerged as a leading force in the conference landscape. No longer just the seat of European institutions, the city is carving out a distinct identity as a destination of choice for high-profile scientific and medical congresses.

The summer of 2025 will mark a milestone for Strasbourg. The city will host two major congresses back-to-back: the International Congress on Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (ESCAP), with over 1,600 delegates from 57 countries, following its 2023 edition in Copenhagen, and the Society of Robotic Surgery (SRS), that will bring 2,000 delegates to the city, after past editions in Melbourne and Orlando.

Growing appeal

These aren't just wins for Strasbourg's event calendar, they are emblematic of its growing appeal to the global scientific community. Champions like Professor Carmen Schröder (ESCAP) and Professor Jacques Marescaux from IRCAD, the Minimally Invasive Surgery & Endoscopic Training Center, have played pivotal roles in attracting these events, building on Strasbourg's world-class medical and research institutions.

This momentum goes beyond one-off successes. Strasbourg's Congress Centre regularly hosts major international meetings such as the E-MRS, SPIE Photonics Europe, and the European Symposium on Vascular Biomaterials.

Building on this strong foundation, the city has already secured a robust pipeline of prestigious congresses over the coming years, including, to name just a few, the European Congress on Intrapartum Care (2027), the RNA Annual Meeting (2027), the International Symposium on Fluorine Chemistry (2027), and the FESSH Congress 2028, expected to welcome 2,000 delegates — confirming its status as a trusted destination for global events.

Sustainable Innovation at Strasbourg Congress Centre

At the core of this growth lies the Strasbourg Congress Centre, one of the first European congress venues, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. Since its opening, the venue

has undergone continuous transformation, with over €200 million invested in recent years to meet the expectations of 21st-century congress organisers.

Its efforts have been recognised through several distinctions, including France's Best Convention Centre (23 & 24), ISO 20121 certification, and the Kréa Award for Social Responsibility Innovation — notably for pioneering partnerships in the circular economy and the creation of an on-site boutique featuring local artisans.

More than a venue, the Strasbourg Congress Centre is a strategic catalyst for the city's international reach, generating €192 million in economic impact. Its flexible design, modern facilities, and prime location near European institutions make it a top choice for events of all sizes, as highlighted by CEO Christophe Caillaud-Joos.

As CMO Ramona Fischer says, *"sustaining Strasbourg's leadership in the international meetings landscape depends on strategically connecting with congresses that align with the city's strengths and are designed to deliver lasting impact."* This strategic approach leverages strong partnerships, a dynamic local ecosystem, and Strasbourg's excellence in medical innovation, life sciences, European governance, and sustainability.

Not only does Strasbourg offer a remarkable hospitality ecosystem — with 11,000 hotel rooms and high-speed rail links just 1h45 from Paris and Frankfurt — but it also embodies the Alsatian spirit of excellence, innovation, and resilience.

More information: rfischer@strasbourg-events.com / www.strasbourg-events.com

Association Focus Returns to IMEX with a Forward-Looking Agenda

As associations go through a rapidly shifting environment shaped by technology, evolving member expectations, and the ongoing demand for value-driven events, IMEX Frankfurt's Association Focus returns with a programme designed to meet the moment. Taking place on Monday, May 19—the day before the main trade show opens—this dedicated day at Kap Europa Convention Center invites association professionals to take a strategic pause and look ahead.

This year's agenda zeroes in on three core pillars: strategic leadership, sustainability, and meeting design—all examined through the lens of relevance and resilience.

One of the headline sessions is led by futurist Henry Coutinho-Mason, who will unpack the nuances of AI integration in association strategy. His talk, *Thriving in the AI Era: Non-obvious Ways to Design a People-First AI Strategy*, promises a fresh perspective on how associations can use artificial intelligence not as an end goal but as a powerful, human-centric tool. *"The future for the event community is a bright one—but only if you remember that AI needs to be a tool, not a goal itself,"* he says.

Meanwhile, ASAE (American Society of Association Executives) will lead a leadership track exploring the evolving responsibilities of today's association executives. Sustainability, a recurring theme, will feature prominently, reflecting the sector's ongoing efforts to reconcile event delivery with environmental responsibility.

"Sustainability is a challenge," notes Evelyn Mansutti from the European Association of Nuclear Medicine, who attended last year's event. *"Each year we introduce new initiatives and have begun measuring CO₂ emissions, but we need new ideas on how to make our events more sustainable."*

ASAE will also present insights from its ForesightWorks research, offering a high-level view of the macro forces shaping the association world—from economic turbulence and technological acceleration to workforce evolution and changing member dynamics. The underlying message: adaptation alone isn't enough—strategic foresight is key.

Elsewhere, a programme curated by Martin Sirk of Sirk Serendipity will home in on content strategy and meeting architecture. Often referred to as the "Crown Jewels" of association events, content is no longer just something to be consumed but a vehicle for engagement, legacy, and brand positioning. A standout session in this track will challenge participants to "flip the format," encouraging them to

rethink long-standing event models and share the elements they'd most like to redesign.

Rounding out the day is a series of rapid-fire case studies where associations from across the globe will share innovations, pilot projects, and experiments—from boosting attendance and revenue to enhancing long-term impact. These fast-paced sessions aim to offer practical inspiration from the front lines of event transformation.

Sponsored by the Amsterdam Convention Bureau, with Encore providing AV support, Association Focus continues to serve as a vital space for reflection and recalibration—especially for association professionals tasked with balancing mission, member value, and market relevance.

Association Focus and is open to registered attendees. Full details and registration are available at imex-frankfurt.com

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