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The New Economics of Associations

2026 VOLUME 1 | VOLUME 2



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LETTER TO OUR READERS

The Reckoning

A recent newsletter by Belinda Moore of Strategic Membership Solutions stopped us in our tracks. Its title alone deserves to be pinned above every association CEO's desk: *"Most of What Associations Sell Is Becoming Worthless. The Rest Is Becoming Priceless."*

Blunt? Yes. Unfair? We don't think so.

Moore's argument is simple and devastating in equal measure: as AI surpasses human capability across most cognitive domains, the transactional layer of association value, ie information, access to content, directories, generic training, is evaporating fast. What remains irreplaceable is precisely what can't be automated: trust, community, genuine human connection, and the kind of peer-to-peer exchange that only associations, at their best, can provide.

We've been circling this truth at Boardroom for some time. In this edition, as well as in the past, we've written about revenue diversification, about rethinking membership models, about the pressure to go global. But Moore's framing cuts through the noise. The question is no longer how associations generate more revenue from what they already do. It's whether what they do still means anything at all.

That's an uncomfortable question. It's also the most important one.

What gives us optimism is that the associations getting this right are not the ones chasing the next digital tool or the flashiest new programme. They're the ones doubling down on what only they can offer: a trusted voice, a community worth belonging to, a reason to gather that goes beyond content consumption.

The worthless is becoming worthless faster than most leaders are willing to admit. The priceless, however, has never been more valuable – or more urgently needed.

That's what Boardroom exists to explore. We hope this issue helps.



Céline Volz

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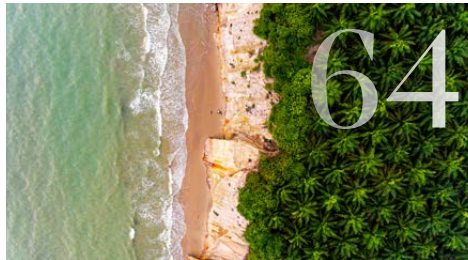
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By Vicky Koffa & Remi Deve

Leadership, Foresight, & Relevance at the European Association Summit 2026

There are plenty of association gatherings in Brussels, but the European Association Summit has quickly established its own place in the calendar. Back at The Merode in March for its third edition, ESAE's event brought together around 300 participants for a conversation that was about how associations lead, how they adapt, and how they prove their relevance when the ground keeps shifting beneath them.



Under the theme 'Define Tomorrow, Act Today: Leading Together for Impact,' discussions throughout the summit centred on a shared question: how can associations remain meaningful and effective when the political, technological, and societal environments around them are increasingly complex?

Leadership as co-creation

From the opening session, the tone was clear: leadership within associations is evolving. In his remarks, ESAE President Mohamed suggested that the traditional model of leadership *for* members is giving way to leadership *with* members.

"In practice, this means that associations must engage their communities more directly in shaping priorities, strategies, and solutions," said Mezghani. *"The emphasis is shifting toward co-creation, shared responsibility, and measurable impact."*

As speakers noted throughout the day, organisations can no longer assume that their relevance is self-evident; they must

continuously demonstrate how they contribute to advancing professions, industries, and communities.

This question of impact framed many of the discussions that followed. Associations operate in an environment characterised by geopolitical tensions, technological disruption, and shifting stakeholder expectations. Navigating such complexity requires not only expertise but also new forms of collaboration and leadership.

Preparing for the future

One of the morning's central conversations focused on foresight, a concept often misunderstood as simple prediction. Instead, Epaminondas Christophilopoulos, UNESCO Chair on Futures Research described it as a structured way of thinking about the future: identifying signals, questioning assumptions, and preparing organisations to respond to multiple possible scenarios.

“The future does not arrive with huge headlines,” he observed. “It arrives with whispers.” For associations, adopting a foresight mindset can help strengthen strategic planning. Rather than reacting to sudden disruptions, organisations can develop the capacity to anticipate change and respond with confidence.

The human dimension of transformation

The summit also repeatedly returned to the human side of organisational change.

During the panel ‘The Human Factor: Leading People Through Change,’ speakers explored a well-known challenge: change initiatives frequently fail not due to weaknesses in the strategy itself, but because people do not clearly understand the reasoning behind it, or feel sufficiently secure to adopt it.

Panelists identified several barriers that can slow transformation: fear of uncertainty, governance gaps, internal politics, and insufficient communication. Addressing these obstacles requires transparency, strong leadership, and an organisational culture that encourages learning.

Artificial intelligence of course surfaced during the day’s discussions, though in a pragmatic rather than speculative way. As Ohri Lahrav, CEO of Kenes Group, suggested: *“AI is prompting associations to rethink skills, business models, and the allocation of staff time, while also opening new opportunities for data analysis, member engagement, and operational efficiency.”*

Collaboration as a strategic necessity

Another theme was the growing importance of coalitions and cross-sector collaboration.

Associations are increasingly expected to work beyond the boundaries of their own sectors. Many of today’s most pressing challenges, whether related to health, sustainability, technology, or regulation, require cooperation

between diverse stakeholders, including policymakers, researchers, industry leaders, and civil society organisations.

At the same time, building such partnerships can be difficult. Competition for visibility, limited resources, and organisational silos can hinder collaboration even when objectives are aligned.

Yet, as Maria Fredin Gruber, Executive Director of the World Stroke Organization, noted: “Coalitions are becoming a strategic necessity. By working together, associations can amplify their voices, share expertise, and tackle complex issues more effectively.”

Governance, diversity, & resilience

The summit also addressed governance challenges facing association leaders. A roundtable on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) examined how organisations can adapt their governance structures to reflect evolving societal expectations while maintaining effective decision-making.

Balancing diverse perspectives with strategic clarity is not always straightforward. Boards must represent a wide range of stakeholders, yet too many competing priorities can slow progress. Leaders therefore face the delicate task of ensuring representation while preserving agility.

Sessions focused on health associations and board-staff dynamics reinforced this broader theme: adaptability is becoming a defining capability. Whether responding to demographic change, scientific developments, or shifting member expectations, associations must continuously refine how they operate.

Associations as spaces of trust

If one idea connected the various discussions throughout the day, it was the enduring role of associations as spaces of trust and dialogue.

In an era marked by polarisation and fragmented public debate, associations remain among the few platforms where

RECOGNISING EXCELLENCE IN THE SECTOR

The summit concluded with the now traditional European Association Awards. The 2026 winners included:

- **DEI Award:** International Society of Paediatric Oncology
- **Events Innovation Award:** European Network of Living Labs
- **Digital Communication Award:** European Hematology Association
- **Impact Award:** European Travel Agents and Tour Operators Association

ESAE also announced the relaunch, next year, of the Executive Master in International Associations Management, powered by Solvay Lifelong Learning, in Brussels.

More on all of this very soon.



diverse stakeholders can gather to exchange knowledge, build consensus, and advance shared goals.

For many participants, this ability to convene communities across borders and disciplines remains one of the sector’s greatest strengths – and one that will only grow in importance as global challenges become more interconnected.

By Dr Ole Petter Anfinssen,
Special Contributor to Boardroom Magazine

Decision Rights: The Hidden Design of Good Governance

When everyone owns it, no one makes decisions -
and the association pays the price



Most boardroom conflicts aren't about personalities or characters – it's about authority and discretion. When directors describe a meeting as 'political,' what they often mean is: *"We don't actually know who gets to decide, so we're negotiating power in real time."*

This process of negotiation rarely looks like a formal debate or discussion. It surfaces as side conversations, surprises, committee interventions, employees questioning themselves, and an Executive Director (ED) or CEO who spends more time managing expectations rather than moving the organisation forward.

So, here's the hard truth: associations always have decision rights. If they haven't designed them, they still have them – only now they're informal, inconsistent, and controlled by whoever has the most influence in the moment. Good governance doesn't require perfect harmony. What it needs is clarity about who decides what, when, and how.

Decision rights are governance sanitation

In many associations, governance is treated as a set of principles: fiduciary duty, ethics, transparency, and accountability. All important – but incomplete.

The real day-to-day experience of governance is determined by something less inspiring: the “plumbing” of decision-making. Decision rights answer basic questions, such as: What decisions will be made by the board, what decisions will be delegated to the ED or CEO, and what requires escalation – and what does not?

Consequently, when decision rights are clear, the association becomes faster, calmer, and more coherent. When they are blurry, even smart people behave irrationally.

Hence, in associations, unclear decision rights usually produce one of three common patterns:

- 1) The board micromanages in the name of “engagement.”
- 2) The ED or CEO overreaches in the name of “agility.”
- 3) Committees become shadow executives.

The real cost: time, energy, and credibility

When decision rights are unclear, the consequences build quietly: decisions that should take days stretch into weeks; operational calls are reversed after the fact; leaders delay telling the truth until they have “perfect” certainty; members receive mixed signals as leaks and confusion spread; and employees burn out, doing the work twice – once to deliver, and once to manage governance.

And the most damaging cost: loss of credibility. Members can feel when an association is indecisive, partners can sense when governance is unstable, and regulators and stakeholders notice when the organisation cannot speak with one voice.

Boards sometimes justify blurred decision rights by saying: “*We’re member-led*”. But member-led is not the same as the membership deciding everything. A member-driven association still needs an operating system. In fact, it needs one even

more because members are diverse, committees are passionate and stakeholders are loud. The organisation must translate many voices into one direction. That translation is governance.

The board’s role is not to act as a loudspeaker for every opinion. It is to act as a filter – a disciplined and controlled mechanism that weighs input against priorities, values, risk, and long-term impact.

One important and helpful tool that makes decision rights more practical is a Delegation of Authority (DoA) framework. This translates governance into clear, day-to-day guidance by specifying who can make which decisions, at what level, and within what limits – which can be referred to as role-determined discretion. At a minimum, it should clarify approval thresholds and escalation points for matters such as: Spending limits, Contract terms, Public positions, Partnerships and Risks. Without these thresholds, decisions become emotional. With thresholds, decisions become predictable, and predictability is not bureaucracy – it is trust.

The discipline of speaking with one-voice

Decision rights also require a cultural rule: debate inside the room, unity outside it. Boards don’t need unanimous thinking. However, they do need unified messaging. When directors campaign externally, leak internal disagreements, or signal “the board is divided,” they convert internal governance into external instability. Members learn to lobby individuals rather than trust the institution.

This is why board leadership must protect two spaces: A boardroom that allows real disagreement, directness and honesty, and a public posture that communicates clarity and cohesion.

Associations don’t need more meetings; they need less ambiguity. Because when everyone is ‘in charge,’ the organisation becomes impossible to govern. And when decision rights are clear, governance becomes what it should be: a system that turns shared purpose into coordinated action.

LESSONS FOR BOARDS

1. Treat decision rights as governance infrastructure

If you don’t design them, informal power will.

2. Separate direction from execution

The board decides outcomes; the ED/CEO decides how to achieve them.

3. Define the power of committees properly

Committees develop and advise; boards decide; employees execute.

4. Use thresholds to remove emotion from escalation

DoA frameworks reduce politics and increase pace.

5. Protect the one-voice rule

Unity after debate is not politeness; it is organisational stability.

6. Deliberately reduce decision latency

When decisions slow, people create workarounds – and trust erodes.

7. Document who decides what

Not for control, but for confidence.

By Remi Deve

Basel Hosts the Inaugural health.tech | global summit

At the intersection of medicine, technology and entrepreneurship, the very first health.tech | global summit took place in early March at Messe and Congress Center Basel, bringing together approximately 6,000 participants from across the global health innovation ecosystem. Over three days, the event convened executives, researchers, policymakers, investors and start-ups to examine how digital technologies - from artificial intelligence to data-driven healthcare - are reshaping the future of medicine.

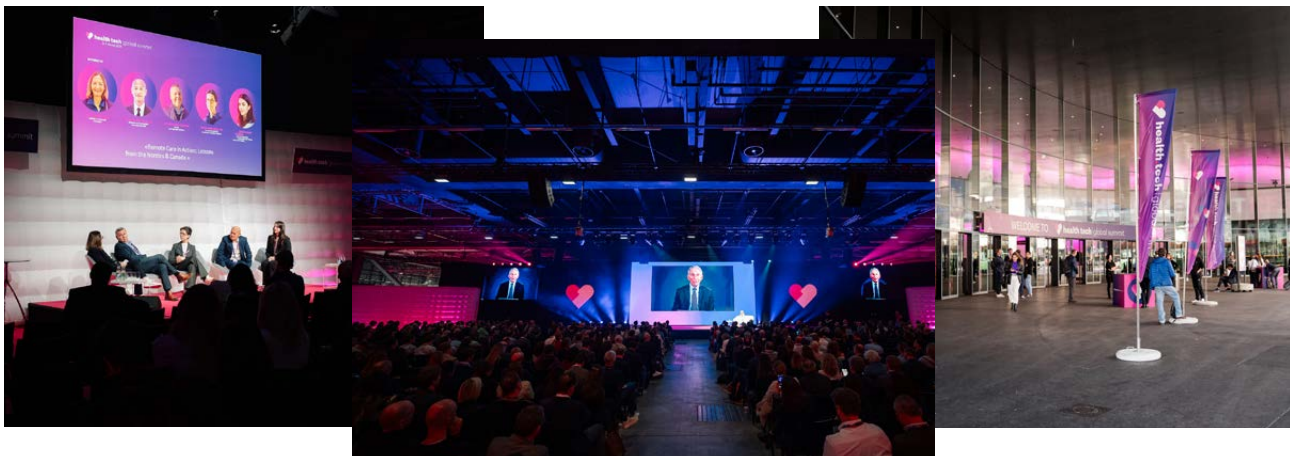
The summit was organised by MCH Group in collaboration with the European start-up festival Bits & Pretzels. Designed as a platform at the crossroads of health, technology and investment, the event combined keynote presentations, panel discussions, investor sessions and start-up showcases. More than 120 emerging companies presented new ideas and solutions, while sessions explored topics including digital health platforms, artificial intelligence in clinical decision-making and new models of patient care.

The programme also reflected a growing recognition that healthcare innovation increasingly sits at the convergence

of multiple disciplines. Discussions addressed regulatory frameworks, the ethical implications of digital technologies, and the challenge of translating research breakthroughs into scalable solutions. High-profile speakers, including Amal Clooney and Dr. Anthony Fauci, featured figures from medicine, technology and public policy, highlighting the summit's ambition to position itself as a global forum for dialogue around health system transformation.

A Platform for an Evolving Industry

The launch of the summit reflects broader structural changes in the healthcare sector. Advances in artificial intelligence,



data analytics and digital platforms are rapidly transforming how care is delivered, monitored and financed. At the same time, venture capital investment and start-up activity in health technology have grown significantly over the past decade, creating new opportunities – and new challenges – for healthcare systems.

Events like this increasingly function as meeting points for actors that traditionally operated in separate spheres: pharmaceutical companies, digital start-ups, hospital systems, academic researchers and investors. By bringing these groups together, the summit aims to accelerate collaboration and shorten the pathway between innovation and implementation.

According to organisers, the strong turnout for the first edition underscores the demand for a dedicated international forum focused on the technological transformation of healthcare. *“The summit has already established itself as an important platform for exchange and collaboration,”* noted Roman Imgrüth, CEO of Exhibitions & Events at MCH Group.

Why Basel?

The choice of Basel as host city just made sense. For decades, the Swiss city has been one of Europe’s most concentrated life sciences hubs, home to global pharmaceutical companies, cutting-edge research institutes and a dense network of biotech and health technology firms.

The region hosts multinational pharmaceutical giants such as Novartis and Roche alongside a growing ecosystem of biotech start-ups and digital health innovators. Together, these organisations form what is often described as a “life sciences supercluster,” combining research, clinical development and commercial activity within a relatively compact geographic area.

The academic environment further reinforces this ecosystem. Institutions such as the University of Basel and research centres including the Biozentrum, University Hospital of Basel, ETH Zurich D-BSSE and University of Applied Sciences

Northwestern Switzerland contribute to a steady pipeline of scientific talent and interdisciplinary collaboration. The Biozentrum alone hosts dozens of research groups working on molecular life sciences, with scientists from more than 40 countries.

In this context, hosting an event dedicated to health technology innovation reflects the city’s broader identity as a hub where scientific research, industry and entrepreneurship converge. Basel’s ecosystem allows conference discussions to extend beyond theoretical debate and connect directly with laboratories, hospitals and companies actively shaping the future of healthcare.

The Role of Place in Knowledge Exchange

For international conferences, this kind of ecosystem matters. Increasingly, association and industry events seek destinations that offer more than meeting space – cities where local expertise, research institutions and industry partners can actively contribute to the programme.

During the summit, participants were offered opportunities to explore the region’s life sciences landscape and to discover Basel’s cultural gems through site visits, workshops and guided city tours organised in collaboration with Basel Tourism under the “Basel Unlocked” programme. Delegates were given the opportunity to explore the Basel old town or to visit companies including Roche and Novartis, as well as local manufacturers and research institutions, gaining direct insight into the ecosystem that underpins the city’s global reputation in pharmaceuticals and biotech.

This type of knowledge exchange aligns with a broader shift in the meetings industry. Conferences increasingly aim to create long-term value for participants by connecting them with the host destination’s intellectual capital. In cities like Basel, these connections can occur organically.

The strong turnout of the first edition of health.tech | global summit suggests that the intersection of health and technology will remain a central theme in global scientific and business discussions for years to come. The next edition is already scheduled to return to Basel in March 2027, signalling the organisers’ intention to establish the event as a recurring platform for dialogue around healthcare transformation.

For Basel, the event reinforces a longstanding identity as a meeting point for trade, science and culture.



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By Remi Deve

How Congrex Switzerland Helped Associations Confront the AI Question in Basel

AI was everywhere at the recent health.tech | Global Summit in Basel - in keynotes, startup showcases, and hallway conversations. But for many association leaders attending the event at the invitation of Congrex Switzerland, the challenge was less about the technology itself than about understanding what it means for the professions and communities they represent.

The Congrex AI & Digital Immersion Programme convened leaders from European medical and scientific associations for a curated two-day immersion at the health.tech | Global Summit in March in Basel. The programme offered insights into AI across drug development, clinical trials, hospital implementation, patient care, and governance, alongside opportunities to engage with more than 120 health technology solution providers.

If Basel as the Summit's host city was only natural given its long-standing role as one of Europe's leading life sciences hubs, the journey for Congrex's association guests concluded with an inspiring roundtable. The objective was clear: demystify artificial intelligence, identify practical implications for associations, and

begin mapping how professional communities might collectively respond to this AI acceleration.

What emerged from the discussion was a shared realisation: AI is no longer a distant topic for research labs or tech companies. It is already reshaping healthcare, research, and the professional ecosystems that associations serve.

"We've been through a very rapid pace of awareness and education," Nouredine M'ghari, Congress & Events Manager at the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI), reflected. *"It feels like we're now arriving at a place where there's a foundational understanding of AI... and now we know the questions we need to ask."*



Moving from Curiosity to Strategy

Many association leaders noted that their organisations often sit at the intersection of multiple stakeholders, and therefore have a unique vantage point. At the same time, many challenges discussed during the roundtable, participants noted, are shared across disciplines: how to evaluate AI tools, how to evaluate AI start-ups, how to educate members, and how to integrate new technologies into professional practice.

“In the lens of all this happening – and knowing we can’t control it – it’s going to impact our associations and our communities,” noted Michèle Schaub Jackson, Executive Manager of the European Stroke Organisation (ESO). *“So now the question becomes: how do we respond?”*

For many, the first step is simply building a shared understanding. AI terminology, tools, and applications sometimes remain difficult to grasp, particularly for professionals who are not directly involved in technical development. Participants repeatedly emphasised the need for clearer language and accessible explanations.

As Gaston Chauchard, Financial & Administration Director at the European Renal Association, remarked. *“If we want some of the solutions we were introduced to during the Summit to be adopted, the storytelling needs to improve. Not everyone listening is an IT specialist.”*

Associations as the “Voice of Authority”

If one theme dominated the roundtable, it was credibility. Healthcare professionals are increasingly surrounded by AI solutions – many promising transformative outcomes, but not all backed by robust evidence. In this environment, associations may have a critical role to play.

“The scarcest resource right now is credibility,” said Prof. Bruno Stankoff, President of ECTRIMS, the European Committee for Research and Treatment on Multiple Sclerosis. *“We’re surrounded by thousands of companies and individuals. It’s impossible to evaluate everything. Having a trusted source that can validate a solution is incredibly valuable.”*

Several participants suggested that associations could adapt familiar mechanisms (such as peer review, conference abstract selection, or expert committee) to assess emerging AI technologies.

“If you apply the same discipline used for scientific abstracts to evaluating startups or solutions that can impact our members, that could be huge for the sector,” Stankoff continued. *“It would help investors, clinicians, and researchers identify real signals in all the noise.”*

This idea resonated strongly with the group. Associations, after all, are built on trust and expertise within specific disciplines.

“There are many questions specific to each association,” Antony Jean Mertens, Executive Manager of ECTRIMS, acknowledged. *“But the methodology to address them might be largely the same.”*

That insight led to the idea of creating cross-association task forces to develop shared frameworks and standards. *“Maybe as a peer group we can become the authority holders of this knowledge,”* Antony suggested. *“We can help set standards.”*

The Education Imperative

If credibility is one pillar of the association role, education is another. Professional societies have long been responsible for training and continuing education in their fields. AI, participants argued, should now become part of that mandate.

“Our associations already focus on education,” Michèle Schaub Jackson said. *“But what we need now is training on the limits of AI: what it can do, and where we should stop relying on it.”*

In healthcare, where AI-driven modelling and digital twins are increasingly used in research and clinical trials, understanding these boundaries is essential. But education also needs to be accessible and practical. Participants pointed out a significant gap in current AI learning resources.

One solution could be integrating AI literacy into accredited continuing education programmes, ensuring that professionals have both an incentive and a structured pathway to develop these skills.

Data, Ethics, & the Foundations of Trust

The discussion also touched on the deeper infrastructure underpinning AI: data. AI systems are only as good as the data they are trained on, and several participants noted that associations may be uniquely positioned to help curate high-quality datasets.

“We’re connected to communities around the world,” explained Eric Dexter, Data Scientist at ESCMID, the European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases. *“That means we’re connected to datasets – and we can help ensure their quality.”*

This raises important questions around governance, the ethical use of data, and standards for AI deployment. There may, indeed, be an opportunity for associations to become authoritative voices within their sectors by exploring how they can steward datasets and set quality standards, recognising that access to data currently often sits with individual members rather than the collective.

“Associations have a role to play in the ethical use of AI,” it was noted. *“It’s something we’re still not talking about enough.”*

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CONGRESS

Redefining Leadership in the Age of AI: IMEX Association Focus Preview

With a strong emphasis on purpose-driven leadership, the transformative impact of AI and the evolving role of events in a rapidly-changing world, the program at Association Focus is set to meet association professionals' most pressing needs head on.

The dedicated day of learning, connection and strategic insight takes place on Monday, May 18 at Kap Europa – the day before IMEX Frankfurt May 19-21. It is organized in collaboration with ASAE and sponsored by Amsterdam Convention Bureau.

With membership retention and engagement still the number one challenge for association professionals (according to ASAE's Insight Update report), Sofya Abramchuk, co-founder of the Originate Institute and advisor at the Gaudi World Foundation, will open with a keynote exploring how revisiting an association's mission – its 'origin story' – can ultimately help strengthen relationships and fuel business growth.

Toby Bassford, Founder & Managing Director of change management consultancy Tillon, delivers the second keynote around AI and the future of work. He'll demonstrate how rapidly advancing AI tools can support rather than disrupt, empowering staff to reclaim time for higher-value work and restoring a sense of purpose.

Two tailored tracks for association leaders & planners

A dedicated track for association leaders examines how associations can harness AI as a strategic advantage. Hosted by ASAE President & CEO Michelle Mason and Amy Hissrich, ASAE's Vice President, International Affairs Global Operations, sessions include a dive into the role of AI to help drive member engagement and revenue diversification.

"Associations today face continuous disruption, tighter margins and rising expectations," explains Michelle Mason. "Resilience means more than managing through change; it means using tools like AI strategically to extend our reach, improve efficiency and personalize engagement."

"The real task for association leaders now is to move beyond experimentation and adopt AI intentionally, in ways that strengthen mission, governance and long-term sustainability."

The track for association planners – curated by Martin Sirk, owner of Sirk Serendipity – offers a practical look at how to embed societal impact into event design and secure stakeholder buy-in along the way. A crowd-sourced segment on future-focused event practices invites attendees to share in advance the new innovations, experiments, or interesting strategic changes their associations have introduced into their events over the past few years.

Martin shares more detail: *"With the help of our pre-event survey, we'll be giving association innovators a chance to showcase what's new and impressive at their events – in only 90 seconds each!"*

"Attendees will also be all hands-on-deck during our provocative take on what networking really is all about, led by meeting design guru Bo Krüger, and we'll be helping associations identify their own unique 'impact-opportunities' in a workshop-style session led by Meet4Impact's Genevieve Leclerc."

Association Focus is sponsored by Amsterdam Convention Bureau with AV provided by Encore. For more information contact: laura.lewis@imexevents.com. It is held on Monday May 18 at Kap Europa Convention Center. IMEX Frankfurt takes place May 19-21. Scan the QR code across this page to attend the show.



FEATURE

The New Economics of Associations

The economics of running an association have never been more complex - or more consequential. Stagnating membership, more demanding sponsors, and members who expect year-round value have pushed decades-old financial models to breaking point. In this special feature, leaders from ICCA, AIPC, IAPCO, Kenes Group, ESAE and ASAE share their perspectives on what rebuilding those models looks like in practice.

Edited by Remi Deve

Smart Practices in Association Fundraising

Building a successful fundraising program requires a clear strategy, engaged leadership, and consistent stewardship that turns donor interest into long-term support.

Philanthropy can play a significant role in advancing your association's mission – but how to leverage the generosity of members, industry partners, and others is often a mystery to association leaders. Here are a few core principles that will help build a strong base of support.

Make the case. Every fundraising effort needs a compelling answer to the donor's fundamental question: "Why should I give?" Your case for support should articulate your mission and values, your vision and goals, evidence of program impact, and the real stories of those who have benefited. Without this foundation, even the most enthusiastic outreach will fall flat.

Activate your board. Board members bring extensive networks and the credibility to inspire others. They should lead by personal philanthropic example and actively engage people in their sphere of influence. A board that embraces a culture of philanthropy provides both momentum and legitimacy to the entire effort.

Start with annual giving. An annual giving program is the entry point for donors and the engine of sustainable, renewable revenue. Segmented appeals based on career stage or areas of interest, challenge or matching gifts that create urgency, and convenient giving options embedded in membership renewals or conference registration all help grow participation. Keeping things simple – such as aligning with the calendar year – makes it easier for donors to say yes.

Invest in major and planned gifts.

With a solid case for support and committed volunteers, associations can cultivate transformational relationships with donors who have the capacity to give significantly, whether now or through their estate. The process follows a clear arc – identification, cultivation, solicitation,

stewardship) and with proper coaching, board members can be effective at most stages.

Brand your philanthropy. Every program or initiative supported by donor funding should be clearly labeled as such, helping potential donors connect the dots. Regular impact reports, beneficiary stories, and consistent visibility across email, social media, your website, and annual meetings all prepare people to give when the moment comes.

Thank donors well. An effective, systemized approach to donor recognition is essential. Thank-you emails, handwritten notes, phone calls from board members, and recognition in publications or at events are not mere courtesies – they are the foundation of future support. A poor stewardship culture will quietly undermine even the best fundraising program.

Invest in the function itself. A "fundraising light" approach yields limited results. Dedicated staff, fundraising software, prospect research, and marketing support are all necessary ingredients. Many of these costs can be shared between the association and its foundation, but cutting corners here is a false economy.

Fundraising success does not happen by accident. It is built deliberately, over time, through trust, consistency, and a genuine commitment to the mission donors are being asked to support.

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By Ioannis Pallas, ESAE Managing Director

New Revenues, New Relevance for Associations

Navigating a single crisis is challenging enough. Facing several at once may feel unprecedented - but it is unlikely to be temporary. Associations are being forced to adapt their strategies and diversify revenue streams or risk a gradual erosion of income that could ultimately undermine their relevance.

Traditionally, professional societies have relied heavily on large conferences as a primary source of revenue, allowing them to keep membership fees relatively low. Trade associations, by contrast, have tended to depend more on membership fees, with events serving primarily advocacy purposes. Today, however, both models are beginning to converge. As margins tighten and membership growth

stagnates, each is increasingly moving into the other's territory in search of new revenue opportunities.

At the recent European Association Summit, it also became clear that risk is on the rise. Associations today are forced to diversify their sources of revenue to ensure financial stability. However, no matter how many new initiatives an association launches, they will all fail if they don't add value to the association's ultimate beneficiaries: the members.

Either through European funding, licensing and accreditation, consulting services, foundation grants, or investments and other non-dues revenues, associations have a wealth of options for revenue diversification. The mix does, of course, need to be tailored to each Association, depending on its structure, culture, scope of activity, and evolving members' needs.

Sponsorships to the rescue - or not?

Long-standing relationships with sponsors remain critical for associations that depend on them. Yet as traditional sponsorship come under pressure, attracting new partners is also proving more difficult. At the same time, the rise of digital solutions is creating new opportunities, with tech-driven companies increasingly funding in-person interactions to connect with potential clients and demonstrate their offerings.

Technology is redefining how associations create and deliver value. As operations expand into the digital space, associations are developing more sophisticated ways to provide sponsor visibility, reducing their reliance on traditional on-site branding such as booths and lanyards.





Associations need to start thinking outside the box, as the old models may not be working anymore. Instead of collaborating around a single annual activity, they can build a year-round engagement with multiple touch points, maximizing their output. Instead of separating delegates from sponsors, associations can design matchmaking opportunities, and leave room for networking where it matters.

Instead of looking at collaboration with sponsors as purely transactional, sponsors can become partners and contribute with valuable content, synergies, and advice on how the associations can better serve their purpose and mission.

Reviewing membership models

Sectors and professions are in constant evolution.

As technology advances, trends shift and end-user needs change, very little remains static. This is not usually the case for associations though, whose members are notoriously averted to change.

Expanding the definition of who can be a member, so as to include new players in a market, introducing new membership categories, with additional benefits and access, or even reducing the scope of a membership, to make the association more niche, allowing it to charge more than it did before, can all result in increased dues.

Altering the scope can be a fundamental, complicated change for an association, but oftentimes an unavoidable one, if an they wish to remain relevant.

To go big, you may need to go global

Staying in a limited region for too long can cause stagnation.

US-based associations tend to be less risk-averse and more business savvy compared to their European counterparts. However, at this geopolitical juncture, US-based associations seem to be focusing their attention on internal developments, leaving space for expansion to others.

Combined with a digitalised environment that reduces distances, and a growing need for professionalisation in many parts of the world (especially some emerging countries), European associations find themselves in a unique position.

Either through congresses, certification, licensing, or even through the expansion into new membership segments, associations can amplify their market access, and gain new, valuable knowledge which, in return, will benefit their existing members.

Global strategies must not be expected to quickly bring a return on investment. Loyalty relies on consistency as much as it does on operational excellence, and an association's board needs to be ready for a long-term investment.

ESAE's recent roadshow across several European capitals, including Paris, Geneva and Amsterdam, exploring the theme of associations going global, offered a number of valuable insights. Associations need to carefully map the competition, legal framework, and demographic trends in the parts of the world where they wish to expand.

An audit of their own structures is also necessary to ensure that all important members give their buy-in, and that the appropriate resources and governance frameworks are in place.

Today is the rainy day to use your reserves

Associations are great at building reserves. They are equally good at preserving them, to absolutely no benefit to anyone involved.

Rising inflation means that the reserves gradually lose their value and become less relevant over time. Which calls for even more reserves!

Although a certain percentage of the budget legally needs to be saved, there are amounts that can be used more strategically: for instance to help an association overcome a crisis, and come back stronger. Either through medium or long-term investment schemes, or by using the reserves to launch a new activity, by purchasing a new time-saving tool or service, or even by hiring high-level staff, reserves can be used to increase an association's output, if handled correctly, ultimately boosting its revenues.

In closing

Board members' pet projects, heavy governance structures, outdated and underused technology, and resistance to change within teams can all weigh an association down. Introducing new funding models is not the silver bullet and can only work when a consensus in favor of change has been reached.

A lot of work, and the establishment of trust are needed to achieve this, but it beats staying stagnant.

Associations had several opportunities to prove their resilience in the past. Now is the time to demonstrate their capacity for ingenuity. To make this happen, they need to rely on engaged members, volunteer leaders who respect the division of responsibilities, up-skilled teams, and most importantly, empowered CEOs who are fit for the job and able to lead their respective communities forward.

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



By Senthil Gopinath, CEO of ICCA

Redefining Financial Resilience in the Association World

Dr. Senthil Gopinath, CEO of ICCA, highlights a shift from traditional, single source revenue models to dynamic, purpose driven strategies rooted in diversification, partnership, and long term impact.

The international association community is navigating an era of compounding uncertainty. Geopolitical shifts, technological disruption, evolving member expectations, and the unpredictability of global events have made one thing clear: the financial models that associations have relied on for decades are no longer sufficient.

What I am observing at ICCA and across our network around the world is that a new type of financial resilience is starting to emerge – one based not in caution and consolidation, but in creativity, diversification, and rethinking how associations create value for members and for the larger community.

From single pillars to “woven nets”

For much of the last century, membership fees and congress revenues together formed the twin pillars of most associations' financial architecture. It was a model that worked well in a time when events were predictable, member loyalty was high, and the economy was stable. But as those conditions have changed, associations

that rely too heavily on one or both of these pillars have found themselves in a tricky situation.

Associations navigating this period successfully are those that have built what feels less like a structure and more like a “woven net” – multiple, connected revenue streams that reinforce each other and provide protection when any one income source becomes shaky. Educational products, certification programmes, research initiatives, advisory services, digital platforms, and mission-aligned ventures are no longer “side” activities; they have become key to financial resilience.

ICCA's own trajectory illustrates this. ICCASkills has become a globally recognised professional development framework, creating a revenue stream that is also mission-aligned: it elevates professional standards, develops the next generation of meetings professionals, and reinforces ICCA's role as a knowledge leader. ICCA Advantage is designed to deliver bespoke training for organisations, and ICCA Masterclass empowers associations to design, deliver, and measure the impacts of their activities and initiatives. These

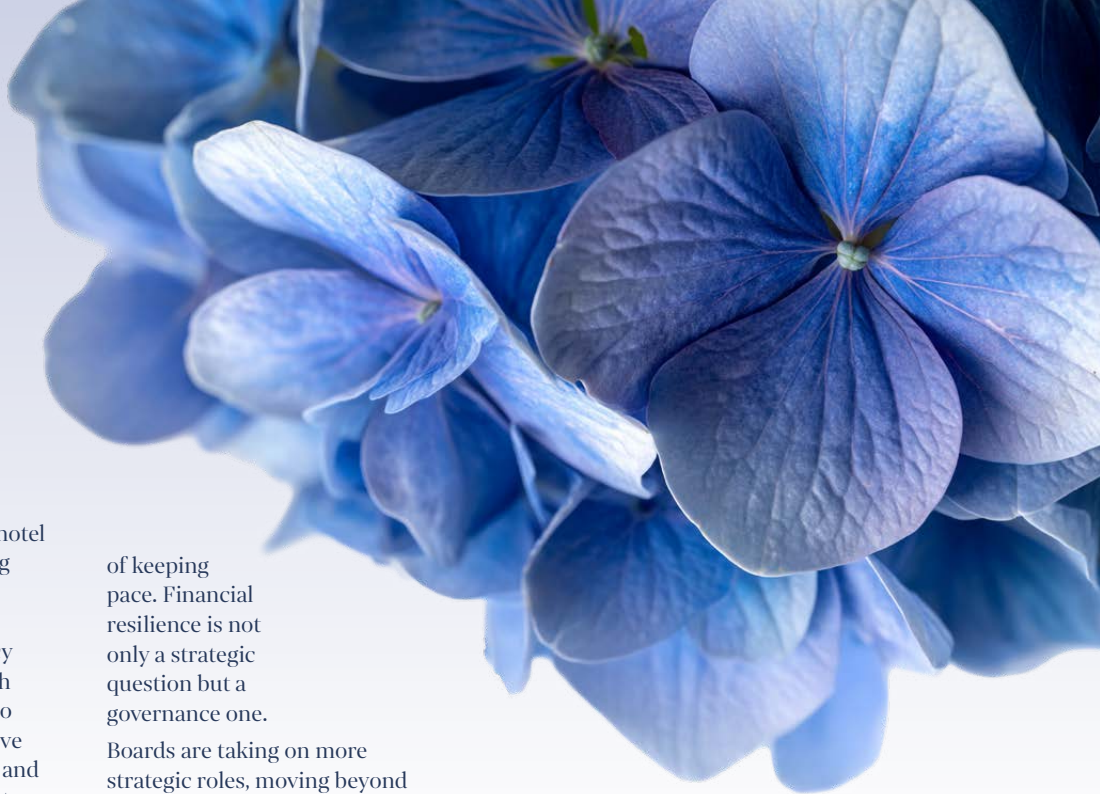
programmes generate income while creating actionable value for members; they are activities in line with our core mission but also build financial durability.

This idea also applies to the broader association community. A medical society that develops a certification programme doesn't just diversify its income; it strengthens its authority, expands its reach, and deepens its relationship with the professionals it serves. A scientific association that invests in a research hub creates a platform that attracts funding, generates publishable content, and positions the organisation as a key authority in its field.

Strategic partnerships: co-creating value

If revenue diversification is the base of real financial resilience, strategic partnership is increasingly the mechanism through which it is achieved. The most forward-thinking associations are no longer treating partnerships as mere sponsorship arrangements – they are co-creating entirely new offerings with universities, NGOs, industry players, and destinations.





The shift in the role of destinations is one of the biggest developments in the new economics of associations. Destinations were once selected mainly on the basis of capacity or hotel inventory, but they are now moving toward something more strategic, and more valuable. Destinations are investing in association legacy programmes, facilitating research collaborations, and committing to longer-term relationships that give associations the planning stability and local networking access they need to deliver real impact.

ICCA and BestCities Global Alliance's Incredible Impacts Programme is an example of this change. The programme showcases the societal value of international association meetings, rewarding innovative congresses that have contributed meaningfully to growth and progress. A \$20,000 grant incentivises legacy thinking, but the bigger value is the signal it sends that congresses are not just gatherings, but legacy engines. Destinations that invest in this kind of legacy framework are co-investors in outcomes that matter.

When destinations co-invest in legacy programming, research infrastructure, and multi-year planning, they reduce the cost and risk burden on the association, and they create the conditions for congresses that attract more delegates, generate more media attention, and leave more durable community benefit, reinforcing the financial case for the event itself.

Governance for uncertainty

All these changes – diversified revenues, flexible business models, partnerships – require governance structures capable

of keeping pace. Financial resilience is not only a strategic question but a governance one.

Boards are taking on more strategic roles, moving beyond fiduciary oversight to participation in financial scenario planning. Rather than budgeting for a single expected outcome, association boards are preparing for a range of possibilities and making resource allocation decisions with multiple scenarios in mind.

More balanced arrangements for congress hosting are increasingly well-documented across ICCA's community. A white paper developed in collaboration with ICCA members by the Copenhagen Convention Bureau reinforces this idea, advocating for a collaborative approach to uncertainty built around three risk pillars: strategic, financial, and operational. The argument is that risk should be shared equitably among all stakeholders rather than absorbed disproportionately by the association. Destinations committed to real long-term partnership are embracing these arrangements as a demonstration of good faith and a foundation for the kind of multi-year relationship that benefits both parties.

A move toward mission-aligned KPIs is also changing financial governance. Associations are moving away from short-term financial metrics and toward indicators that connect revenue performance to purpose delivery. ICCA, alongside founding partners including Barcelona, Copenhagen, Flanders, Sydney and Tokyo, are leading the development of a Global Impact Measurement Tool for Association Conferences. The tool is designed to quantify the social, scientific, and economic value generated by association meetings, capturing benefits that extend far beyond traditional delegate-spend metrics.

This is financial governance reoriented around purpose: when associations can demonstrate and measure the real-world impact of their congresses, they make a more compelling case to members, funders, destinations, and policymakers alike.

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



By Erin Fuller

A Turning Point for Association Finances

The money mix has changed.
The operating model has to catch up.

Most associations are running a 2015 financial model in a 2026 world. The uncomfortable truth is that many leaders know it and just haven't had the forcing function to do something about it.

That forcing function is now here.

The pressures aren't new (economic uncertainty, shifting member expectations, more selective sponsors, tighter budgets). What's new is the way they're stacking and forcing associations to rethink how they make money. Dues and a flagship annual conference used to be the twin engines of stability. For a growing number of organizations, that foundation is cracking.

MCI's recent analysis of nearly 50 associations showed that 77% of operational funding now comes from non-dues revenue. That number has been rising for years; the difference now is the strain around it. Sponsor expectations are higher; they want a consultative strategic partner, not an order taker. Revenue streams that looked "fine" in stable times are proving brittle under pressure. The organizations that are winning are the ones willing to rebuild the model, not just patch it.

Revenue diversification: what it actually looks like

The strongest associations are building their commercial portfolios around three pillars: exhibits, sponsorships and custom solutions. Across the 50 associations we analyzed, those pillars account for roughly 71% of total commercial partnership revenue. The shift isn't the mix – it's the activation.

Sponsorships have moved past logos on signage. The best programs start with a sponsor's business problem, then build creative activations that deliver measurable outcomes while improving the member experience. Custom solutions are where associations turn their unfair advantages – proprietary research, niche audiences, trusted

thought leadership – into intelligence and access that partners will pay a premium for.

In our analysis, print advertising revenue has declined since 2021. That doesn't mean legacy channels are dead; it means they can't be the centerpiece. Reposition them as add-ons that support higher-value, measurable offerings.

What associations can't afford is the reflex to launch another program or event the moment revenue feels flat. Sometimes it works. More often, it cannibalizes your flagship conference, accelerates member and partner fatigue, and adds cost without enough return.

Before you add anything new, stress-test it: Does it fill a real gap? Is the

What's new is the way
they're stacking and forcing
associations to rethink
how they make money.



value truly unique? And will sponsors have a compelling reason to invest?

Partnerships as financial strategy

One of the biggest mindset shifts associations need is redefining what “partnership” actually means. Too many organizations still treat sponsors as transactional revenue sources (booth fees, logo placements, one-off activations) instead of strategic collaborators with shared goals – and shared risk.

The associations building resilient revenue models invite partners in early and co-create programs that advance sponsor objectives and the member experience. Treat sponsors like clients whose business challenges you’re helping solve, and everything gets less fragile: the relationship deepens, renewals strengthen, and revenue becomes more predictable.

The same logic applies to destination partners. Not a one-cycle site incentive conversation, but a long-term partnership built around outcomes. The strongest destinations don’t just “sell the city”; they co-design programming, open doors to local industry, and help build experiences you can’t replicate anywhere else. And they connect your mission to local priorities, whether supplier networks, academic partners or workforce development, so you can make a sharper business case for attendance to boards, sponsors and members.

Upgrading financial governance

There are a lot of conversations happening about revenue diversification. The same cannot be said for financial governance. Most association boards still approach financial oversight as something that happens from a 10,000-meter viewpoint: Review the budget, approve the forecast, check the reserves. But in an environment this volatile, governance has to function as a strategic competency. That means shorter planning cycles, scenario-based budgeting that accounts for real disruption and clearer metrics for what “sustainable” means for your organization.

It also means having the courage to sunset programs that aren’t performing. One of the hardest things for a board to do is retire something that’s been around for years, especially when it still generates some revenue. But holding onto low-performing programs because of legacy consumes resources that could be directed toward building the next generation of offerings. Letting data, not nostalgia, guide those decisions is one of the clearest signs of mature financial leadership.

Where this leaves us

Financial conversations in associations have been too polite for too long. Leaders talk about diversification in broad strokes, treat governance like a compliance exercise, and call sponsors “partners” while still keeping them at arm’s length instead of building true shared-accountability relationships.

Meanwhile, the gap between organizations that are adapting and those that are stalling is getting wider, and faster. The ones gaining ground are diagnosing honestly, governing with discipline, sunsetting sacred cows, and designing partnerships where everyone has real skin in the game.

That’s what financial resilience looks like and what the new economics of associations demand.

Erin Fuller, CAE, FASAE, is the chief strategy officer at MCI USA. This article is part of an exclusive partnership between IAPCO and Boardroom.

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By Sven Bossu, CEO of AIPC

It's All About Value for the Members

At the European Association Summit in Brussels, a panel discussion - in which I participated - focused on revenue diversification for associations. And while all the panelists and the moderator worked for very different organisations, there was one message we agreed upon: growth for the sake of growth is not a strategy.

For a long time, AIPC focused on membership growth as a key engine for revenues. In a way, this makes sense, as membership fees are the biggest source of revenue for our association, while in other cases that might be the annual conference or certifications. In the case of AIPC, the ratio is 70/30, with 70% of revenues coming from membership fees. So having a KPI on net membership growth seemed the way to go.

We are however changing our focus. While membership of course remains a top priority, we are having a closer look at member engagement, which - in our case - is expressed in participation(s) to one or more of our (educational) events.

The reasons why

There are a number of reasons for this shift. First of all, we noticed that it is quite easy to obtain new members in certain parts of the world, but that they do so without fully

embracing the values of the association - and in some case for very opportunistic reasons - resulting into short-lived memberships.

Secondly, we saw that in a number of cases the touchpoints between the association and members was limited to a single person. When this person would move jobs or retire, there was no more touchpoint, meaning we lost the advocate for the AIPC membership within that organisation.

Which brings me to the third and final point: because of the way we manage member data, we fail to match our value proposal with the correct audiences and therefore miss out on revenues other than membership fees.

Let me elaborate a bit on the last aspect. Like many associations, our CRM database has a number of layers, but it basically comes down to person/function/organization. So if we organise a sales & marketing summit, we do a campaign

towards all persons in our databases who have the “tag” sales and/or marketing. The problem with this, is that our database is not a dynamic one as it does not take into account the career evolutions of a person within the member organisation. We will notice that the person no longer works at a convention centre (as we get an error message), but if a person moved from sales to operations, we simply don’t know and we continue to send the same message to a person for whom the message is no longer relevant. In some cases, we are lucky because the person will forward the message to the correct person – who might register to the event – but this does not solve our basic problem, as the database will not be (automatically) corrected.

AI again

And that is where AI – I know, but in this case it does make a difference – kicks in. There are a number of sources where you can find information on a person’s career evolution – an obvious example is LinkedIn. So what we want to achieve a link between our CRM and sources like LinkedIn, which would allow to make our database dynamic. But this is just the starting point.



Once we feel confident that the data is correct, we can actually start clustering individuals in “persona” and create matching product and services offerings at that level. Today, we already defined those persona, but do not feel sure enough about our data to start implementing the link.

So this is how the ideal situation looks like: Person A at Convention Centre X moves from operations to sales and announces this proudly on LinkedIn. This is picked up by our “AI Radar” and a congratulations mail is immediately sent to the person and we also notify the person that we will send her/him messages and offers which are in line with the new job. If Person B leaves Convention Centre X to start working at Convention Centre Y, which is not a member, a congratulations message will go out to his LinkedIn profile, expressing the hope that she/he will onboard the new employer into the AIPC Community. Or if Person C gets a promotion and has now the right profile to attend one of educational programmes, we can reach out accordingly.

There are a number of challenges with this “to-be” situation. First of all, an architecture needs to be put in place allowing to connect the dots. Secondly, a data policy needs to be defined and communicated. And thirdly, a solid tracking mechanism needs to be put in place, allowing to measure results and impact.

But if overcome, we will be able to have a far deeper understanding of our community and their changing needs, allowing to adapt our services and product offering and at the end deliver more value to our community, with additional revenues generated which can be re-invested, creating a circle of continuous improvement and value increase.

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

Financial Resilience in the New Association Economy

Why the question associations should be asking is not
“How do we generate more revenue?” but
“How do we build resilience into our organisational DNA?”

Imagine your flagship annual congress is six months away. Then a geopolitical crisis closes borders, an economic downturn shrinks travel budgets, or, as a generation of association leaders learned, a global pandemic makes gathering impossible. What happens to your organisation?

For the 46 percent of associations that rely on their annual meeting as their primary income source, the answer is stark. The organisation's financial stability depends on a single event, in a world where conditions can change overnight.

Recent disruptions were not isolated incidents. They signalled a new operating reality. Constant change is now the environment in which associations function. Geopolitical uncertainty, shifting member expectations, evolving sponsor demands, and economic volatility are no longer temporary challenges. They are the conditions shaping strategic decisions.

Associations that continue to depend heavily on one or two revenue streams are not being cautious. They are exposed to unnecessary risk. The real question is not how to generate more revenue, but how to build the financial resilience needed to sustain the mission through uncertainty.

Why traditional models are losing strength

Associations were built for predictability. Membership dues formed a stable foundation. The annual congress generated most operating income. Industry partners reliably supported the event cycle. This model worked for decades, but it no longer reflects today's realities.

Traditional income structures reveal three vulnerabilities.

Concentration risk. When a single annual event generates most revenue, any disruption to that event creates a significant financial threat. A climate event, political disruption, destination issue, or global health emergency can undermine organisational stability overnight.

Funding evolution. Funders and industry partners expect measurable return on investment, visibility across the year, and access to audiences through multiple channels. Engagement concentrated around one event no longer meets their expectations.

Evolving member needs. Members seek continuous value. They expect education, community, and resources throughout the year, not only at an annual gathering. Associations unable to provide this risk undermining the value proposition of membership itself.

Recognising that the model is strained is one thing. Rebuilding it is another.

Diversification as risk management

Some boards worry that diversification risks commercialisation or mission drift. In reality, diversification is risk management and a core governance responsibility.

Mission-aligned revenue strengthens an association's ability to deliver purpose. A resilient organisation can fund research, develop programmes, and advocate with greater stability than one dependent on a single income source.

Opportunities include year-round digital learning, shared-investment partnerships, data products, and advisory services. What has changed is that digital platforms, real-time data, and AI now allow associations to pilot new ideas at lower cost and lower risk. Instead of committing fully, organisations can test initiatives, measure impact, and adapt quickly.

Diversification therefore requires cultures and governance frameworks that support experimentation. Not every initiative succeeds immediately, but resilience is built through iteration and learning.

Partnerships as a path to resilience

Strategic partnerships are one of the most effective and overlooked tools for financial resilience. These are collaborations built on shared goals and mutual benefit.

One global association created a funding consortium bringing together NGOs, scientific organisations, patient groups, and industry partners. This collaborative structure supports research, advocacy, and policy work and provides stable, long-term funding for mission-critical activities.

Another example comes from a global scientific community that partnered with industry to extend its annual congress into a year-round digital education programme. By transforming congress resources into practical learning, the collaboration generated mission-aligned revenue while strengthening the association's educational leadership and financial resilience.

These cases demonstrate a clear lesson. Partners are not merely financial contributors. They are strategic allies. When partnerships are designed around shared objectives, they create durable and resilient value.

The Governance Shift That Must Happen

Diversification requires governance models suited to uncertainty. Boards must rethink how they define success.

Asking whether the event made budget remains necessary, but no longer sufficient.

Boards must also ask whether the organisation is reducing dependency on concentrated revenue, whether new initiatives meet established metrics, and whether the organisation is building the capabilities needed for the future.

Boards must also adapt to a faster pace. Opportunities in digital engagement, partnerships, and product development move more quickly than traditional board cycles. Agility is essential.

Boards also need the right expertise. Evaluating digital platforms, assessing commercial opportunities, and negotiating strategic partnerships require competencies that may not be present in boards composed primarily of subject experts.

In practice, this means creating separate budgets for innovation, running pilots with clear criteria, integrating scenario planning into governance, and reshaping financial reporting. Boards must understand the performance and mission return of the entire product mix, not just individual revenue lines.

A simple five-stage cycle can help: Assess, Co-create, Build the Case, Test and Learn, Scale. This process turns ideas into action and embeds innovation as an ongoing organisational habit.

If a board cannot confidently say the organisation would survive a year without its flagship event, it has a resilience gap, not a hypothetical risk.

This article was written by Louise Gorringer for Kenes Group. Louise has over 15 years of experience working with medical and scientific associations at Kenes Group. Appointed AVP of Association Management in 2017, she leads a team of 40+ professionals supporting 28 global associations and has been instrumental in growing the business, expanding services, and strengthening governance and operations.





In Australia caring for our country is just what we do. We believe a land as precious as ours should be preserved for generations to come.

As a visitor, we ask that you do the same. That's why we've set some unwritten rules that have kept our backyard beautiful for thousands of years. Consider these principles as a bit of local knowledge. A few fundamentals to help you respect this place and have an unforgettable stay in the process.



Celebrate
Community



Embrace
Culture



Preserve
Place



Respect
Wildlife



Take
Care

Business Events
Australia



By Remi Deve

Australia's Knowledge Edge

When thousands of space scientists gathered in Sydney for the 76th International Astronautical Congress, the conversations did not stop at the convention centre doors. Delegates found themselves engaging with researchers, engineers, entrepreneurs and students who are actively shaping the future of the global space sector.

That kind of connection is precisely what Australia is increasingly offering international associations: not simply a place to meet, but a place where conferences intersect with real research ecosystems and industry expertise.

Across the country, from Sydney and Melbourne to Brisbane, Gold Coast, Cairns, Adelaide, Perth, Canberra, Darwin and Hobart, convention bureaux, universities and industry leaders are working together to ensure congresses do more than fill auditoriums. They become platforms for collaboration, discovery and long-term partnerships.

Robin Mack, Managing Director of Tourism Australia said: *"In Australia, we view business events not only as a crucial tourism segment, but as a strategic pillar of Australia's knowledge economy. Securing global congresses linked to our key industry sectors is about more than just a short-term economic boost; it's a strategic investment. These events bring the world's best minds to our shores, acting as a catalyst for new research, partnerships, and long-term innovation and change in Australia."*

Australia's innovation story has long extended far beyond its landscapes and pristine beaches. Over the past decades,

discoveries emerging from Australian laboratories – from the cervical cancer vaccine and ultrasound imaging to the bionic ear and high-speed Wi-Fi – have transformed lives around the world.

That same problem-solving mindset now shapes the country's approach to business events.

International associations meeting in Australia often gain direct access to the researchers, policymakers and industry pioneers driving innovation in their fields. These connections are frequently

facilitated by the country's convention bureaux, which see conferences not simply as gatherings of delegates but as catalysts for knowledge exchange.

Behind this approach lies a deliberate national strategy: aligning business events with Australia's most dynamic knowledge sectors.

Today, six priority industries form the backbone of this effort: health; resources and energy; defence and space; agribusiness and food; technology and manufacturing; and infrastructure.



Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre



Health and Research Precinct in Perth, Western Australia

Each combines strong research capability, industry leadership and public investment, creating fertile ground for conferences seeking both intellectual depth and real-world impact.

Where Research Meets Industry

Across these sectors, Australia's innovation ecosystem is producing breakthroughs that resonate far beyond the country's borders.

In defence and space, South Australia has rapidly emerged as a national hub. With the Australian Space Agency headquartered in Adelaide, companies such as Fleet Space Technologies are developing satellite-based exploration tools capable of transforming how minerals and natural resources are discovered.

In agribusiness and food, innovation often centres on sustainability and resilience. Process engineer Sachini De Silva, for example, has helped develop an off-grid water treatment system capable of delivering clean water in remote environments, an innovation with potential applications ranging from agriculture to disaster response.

Meanwhile, Australia's health sector continues to generate globally recognised breakthroughs. Melbourne's Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity demonstrated this during the COVID-19 pandemic, when its scientists were among the first outside China to

successfully map the virus genome, an achievement that helped accelerate global research efforts.

Australia's resources and energy sector, historically a cornerstone of the national economy, is also undergoing a profound transformation. In Western Australia, the Asian Renewable Energy Hub, one of the largest renewable energy projects ever proposed, is designed to produce green hydrogen at scale for export across Asia.

In technology and advanced manufacturing, the country is gaining recognition for its work in frontier technologies such as quantum computing. Sydney-based Silicon Quantum Computing, led by Professor Michelle Simmons, is pioneering efforts to build quantum computers at the atomic scale.

And across Australia's cities, major investments in infrastructure are reshaping the built environment. Projects such as Melbourne's Metro Tunnel and Sydney's Western Sydney International Airport illustrate how large-scale engineering initiatives are transforming connectivity and urban mobility.

Cities That Reflect Sector Strengths

Australia's strength as a meetings destination also lies in the diversity of its cities, each anchored in distinctive research clusters and industry ecosystems.

Melbourne, widely recognised as a global hub for biomedical research, continues

to attract major medical gatherings such as the International Diabetes Federation Western Pacific Region Congress, bringing specialists together to explore advances in diabetes research and care.

In Brisbane, where a rapidly expanding health and biotechnology ecosystem is supported by institutions such as the Translational Research Institute and QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute, the city will host, among many other conferences, the World Congress of Paediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (WCPGHAN) 2028.

Further west, Perth regularly convenes experts in energy and environmental research, hosting meetings such as the International Conference on Greenhouse Gas Control Technologies, reflecting the region's expertise in resources and sustainability.

In Sydney, meanwhile, the 16th World Congress on Endometriosis 2025 brought more than 1,100 clinicians and researchers from over 60 countries to the International Convention Centre (ICC) Sydney, highlighting Australia's leadership in women's health research.

And in Cairns, surrounded by the Great Barrier Reef and tropical rainforest ecosystems, scientific meetings often take on an additional dimension. The Viruses of Microbes 2024 congress, hosted at the Cairns Convention Centre, brought together researchers exploring the crucial role viruses play in ecosystems and planetary health.

Together, these destinations illustrate the breadth of Australia's business events landscape: major metropolitan hubs complemented by specialised regional centres, each anchored in thriving knowledge communities.

Connecting Associations with Expertise

One of the engines behind Australia's success in attracting association congresses is also its extensive ambassador networks.



World Congress on Endometriosis 2025, Sydney



Brisbane, Queensland



Cairns Marina, Tropical North Queensland

Across the country, convention bureaux work with leading academics, scientists and industry figures who actively support international bids and contribute intellectual leadership to events.

In Sydney, the Global Ambassador Program run by Business Events Sydney mobilises prominent figures across sectors to champion international congress bids. Melbourne's Victorian Ambassador Network performs a similar role, connecting global associations with respected leaders in science, medicine and industry.

For associations, these programmes provide far more than advocacy. They ensure conferences are embedded within local research communities, opening doors to laboratories, innovation hubs and industry partners.

"One of Australia's greatest assets is our people," notes Mack. *"Our world-leading*

experts are passionate about sharing their knowledge. And when these ambassadors engage with international associations, they link global missions with local breakthroughs, and foster collaborations that could define the future of the sector."

Infrastructure Built for Global Events

Australia's ability to host large-scale congresses is underpinned by a network of modern convention centres widely recognised for their service quality and sustainability standards.

But the landscape continues to evolve.

In regional Victoria, the Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre, set to open in July, will introduce new conference capacity just outside Melbourne.

Meanwhile, a wave of high-end hospitality developments is

strengthening accommodation options for international delegates. On the Gold Coast, luxury properties including the Andaz, Ritz-Carlton and St. Regis, all close to the Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre, are enhancing the destination's appeal for global events.

In Adelaide, hotels such as The Westin Adelaide and the soon-to-open Crystalbrook Sam are adding further capacity within walking distance of the Adelaide Convention Centre.

Altogether, Australia is undergoing a significant premium transformation. Nearly 6,000 new hotel rooms are expected to enter the market over the next two years, around 60% of them under luxury brands, including the upcoming Waldorf Astoria on Sydney Harbour.

A Platform for Collaboration

For association leaders evaluating future congress destinations, Australia's appeal increasingly lies in its potential for impact.

Here, conferences are often designed to connect delegates not only with each other but with the wider research and innovation ecosystem surrounding them.

From global space gatherings in Sydney to environmental science meetings in Cairns and medical congresses in Melbourne or Brisbane, the country's destinations demonstrate how location can amplify the purpose of an association event.

SUPPORTING GLOBAL CONFERENCES: AUSTRALIA'S BID FUND PROGRAM

Australia's commitment to attracting international association meetings is backed by targeted financial support through the Business Events Bid Fund Program (BFP).

Introduced in 2018, the program provides funding to help secure international conferences and exhibitions aligned with Australia's six priority industry sectors. The initiative supports events that attract a minimum of 400 international delegates, helping offset costs such as accommodation, venue hire and transport.

The program has already proven highly effective. To date, 211 events have been secured for delivery through to 2029, representing an estimated A\$1.43 billion in economic value for Australia.

More information:
businessevents.australia.com

By Vicky Koffa

Perth Offers A More Connected Backdrop for Business Events

Perth is refining its proposition for international meetings and conferences with a city centre that feels increasingly connected, contemporary and experience-led. Set on the Swan River and framed by Western Australia's coastal lifestyle, the city combines natural appeal with an urban rhythm that suits both delegates and organisers. Strong hospitality, walkable precincts, distinctive venues and a business events landscape that continues to evolve.

What stands out is not only Perth's climate and scenery, but the way recent development is reshaping how people move through the city. From Yagan Square to Elizabeth Quay, and from cultural institutions to new hotel openings, Perth is creating a more cohesive environment for conferences and meetings.

A city where lifestyle supports the delegate experience

Perth's appeal begins with its setting. Sun-soaked, relaxed and visually

striking, it offers a sense of space that is increasingly valued by associations and meeting planners alike. Beaches, riverfront areas, parks, cafés, markets and cultural precincts sit within easy reach of the CBD, giving delegates more than a venue-only experience.

For many organisers, the strength of a destination lies in what happens around the formal programme, e.g. the quality of informal networking, the ease of moving between meetings and social events, and the sense that delegates are experiencing a place with

character. In Perth, outdoor living and urban sophistication sit comfortably together, allowing business events to feel productive.

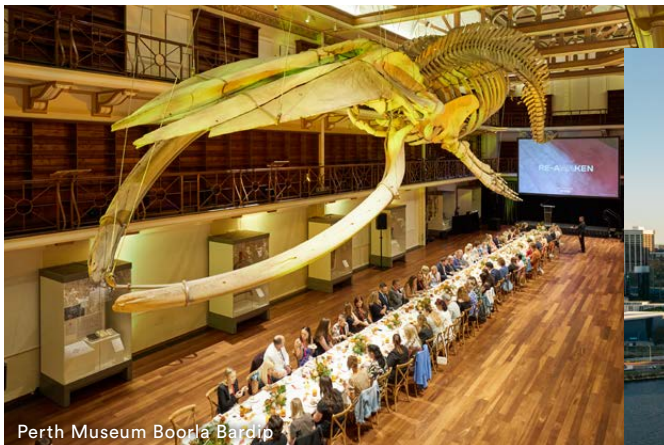
Redevelopment is strengthening the conference ecosystem

Recent and upcoming developments across Perth are helping to reshape the city's layout in ways that directly benefit the meetings sector. Greater interconnectivity between precincts is making the delegate journey smoother, while also broadening the range of cultural, dining and event spaces available within a compact footprint.

A key example is Edith Cowan University's new City Campus, positioned between Perth's traditional corporate core and the Northbridge arts precinct. Its opening has reinforced the link between Yagan Square and surrounding business, academic and creative communities, adding both energy and footfall to the city centre. With thousands of students and staff already animating the precinct, and long-term growth expected by 2030, the campus is changing the CBD's daily rhythm and supporting a more vibrant inner-city environment.



Edith Cowan University's new City Campus



Perth Museum Boola Bardip



Elizabeth Quay

Within this evolving urban network, the Western Australian Museum Boola Bardip stands out as one of Perth's most compelling event settings. With seven distinctive venue spaces, it offers organisers flexibility for welcome receptions and functions. Its grand foyers, capable of accommodating up to 870 guests, make it particularly suited to larger-scale gatherings seeking a venue with both capacity and cultural resonance.

The city is offering the right infrastructure but pairing it with local identity, giving delegates a stronger sense of connection to Western Australia.

Yagan Square and Elizabeth Quay expand the city's event geography

Yagan Square has emerged as a strategic point in Perth's redevelopment story. Alongside the ECU City Campus, venues such as Stories are contributing to a more animated CBD and a stronger bridge to Northbridge's dining and entertainment offer. Spread across five levels, Stories brings together bars, restaurants, private dining spaces, a rooftop venue and an open-air amphitheatre, with capacity for up to 1,000 guests.

On the opposite side of the CBD, Elizabeth Quay continues to reinforce Perth's waterfront. The precinct has transformed the Swan River foreshore into an active public space and remains central to the city's long-term vision for connectivity. Future developments such as EQWest are expected to add further mixed-use capacity, supporting conferences and business events with contemporary spaces and a distinctive riverside setting.

Accommodation is also evolving in line with the city's event ambitions. New openings are widening the range of centrally located options for delegates who want to stay close to major attractions, meeting spaces and social venues.

One example is HYDE Perth, a recent CBD addition located within walking distance of Elizabeth Quay. With 121 rooms, including 18 suites, and a design-led identity that differentiates it from more conventional corporate hotels, it reflects the city's broader move towards hospitality with personality. Its Green Room, accommodating up to 75 guests, also adds another option for

launches, smaller corporate events and private functions.

Looking to regional Western Australia

Western Australia's business events story does not end in the capital. In the South West, Busselton is steadily emerging as a conference destination in its own right, supported by new venue and hotel developments that are expanding the region's appeal to organisers.

At the centre of that growth is Saltwater Busselton, which is strengthening local capacity for business events and larger corporate functions. Together with the Hilton Garden Inn Busselton, these additions signal a destination developing its own meetings offer, with the advantage of a distinctive South West setting.

To explore how Perth can support your next association meeting connect with Business Events Perth at info@bep Perth.com or visit www.businesseventspert Perth.com for further information.

By Remi Deve

Why Adelaide Is Catching the Attention of Associations

The business events sector has become far more focused on impact. Associations are now being asked to show how their events reflect organisational values, contribute to local communities and generate outcomes that can be measured after delegates have gone home. That expectation is coming not only from members, but increasingly from sponsors, partners and boards looking for clearer evidence of purpose. Adelaide Convention Centre's Community Impact Program was designed for precisely that shift, offering organisers a practical way to embed ESG and legacy objectives into conference delivery.



A framework built for action

Launched just over 12 months ago, the programme sits within Adelaide Convention Centre's broader ESG strategy, The Green Print, and responds to the persistent industry challenge that many organisers want to deliver socially responsible events, but few have the time, in-house capacity or local networks to build meaningful initiatives from scratch.

Adelaide's answer is not to add another layer of complexity. Instead, it provides a structured framework that is easy to activate and flexible enough to align with different event profiles. The aim is to help organisers connect conference delivery with wider purpose, create tangible local outcomes and strengthen the narrative they bring back to members, sponsors and stakeholders. Just as importantly, it gives them outcomes that can be communicated with greater credibility after the event.

What makes the model especially relevant is its place-based design. It does not rely on broad sustainability messaging, but links organisers with South Australian partners capable of delivering credible, measurable results in the destination itself. That focus on local community gives the initiative far more substance than generic offsetting or one-off charitable gestures.

Four pillars, locally anchored

The programme is organised around four pillars: community, environment, First Nations engagement, and goods donation and resource recovery. Each one is supported by established South Australian organisations, giving associations a practical menu of options that can be integrated into event planning without becoming a separate workstream.

On the community side, Adelaide Convention Centre works with Operation Flinders, whose outback adventure therapy programmes support young people from challenging backgrounds. For environmental action, the partnership with Trees For Life allows organisers to support biodiversity projects in South Australia, including through carbon programmes or tree planting. First Nations engagement is developed with Reconciliation South Australia, creating opportunities for more meaningful connection to Kaurua Country and local culture. The fourth pillar focuses on resource recovery, redistributing surplus food and event goods through organisations such as OzHarvest, Vinnies and Foodbank rather than sending them to landfill.

Organisers can donate part of a registration fee, replace speaker gifts with native tree planting, or incorporate cultural engagement that is rooted in the destination itself rather than added as a separate initiative. The Centre's team then helps

facilitate those connections, making legacy part of the event design rather than an additional burden on already stretched organising teams.

Where the model is proving itself

The programme's strongest argument is that it is already delivering outcomes across very different event formats. At the 2025 Australian United Retailers Conference & Exhibition, surplus exhibitor food and beverage products were redirected to OzHarvest. According to Adelaide Convention Centre, that single activation resulted in more than 6,700 kilograms of food donated, equivalent to 13,400 meals for people facing food insecurity.

At the 2025 TSANZSRS Annual Scientific Meeting, organisers chose to replace traditional speaker gifts with tree planting through Trees For Life. The result was 170 native trees planted in South Australia, one on behalf of each speaker. It was a well-judged piece of event design since a respiratory health meeting used its speaker recognition budget to support what organisers described as the "lungs of the earth".

Most recently, the Centre completed its 100th activation through the programme, with 296 surplus meals from the Metcash IGA & Foodland Trade Show donated to Foodbank. On its own, that might seem like a modest intervention, but it points to something more significant. Legacy is often built through repeatable decisions embedded across multiple events rather than through one flagship gesture, particularly when organisers need models that can be replicated year after year.

That cumulative effect is becoming visible. In the programme's first 12 months, Adelaide Convention Centre reports that more than 28,000 unused meals and 1,708 kilograms of leftover grocery items from exhibitions were redistributed, while biodiversity initiatives and landfill diversion were also supported through the model. Internally, the Centre has applied the same logic to its own operations, donating more than 10,000 square metres of used carpet tiles to charitable and community causes and introducing paid volunteering for staff, who contributed over 500 volunteer hours across the year.

What Adelaide is demonstrating is not that every event needs a grand legacy strategy. It is showing that venues can make impact delivery concrete, local and measurable, and that associations do not need to choose between operational simplicity and social value.

To explore Adelaide Convention Centre's Community Impact Program and event legacy options, visit www.adelaidecc.com.au

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Global Law Fraternity to Gather in Australia's Northern Territory

In May 2027, approximately 800 legal professionals from Commonwealth countries around the globe will descend on Australia's Northern Territory (NT) to attend the Silver Jubilee 25th Commonwealth Law Conference (CLC) at the Darwin Convention Centre.

The Commonwealth Lawyers Association (CLA) will host the biennial conference – its membership includes legal professionals, academics and students practising within the 56 countries and independent member states that make up the Commonwealth

The journey to destination selection

Following an initial meeting in mid-2024 with CLA, a joint bid was developed by Northern Territory Business Events (NTBE) and Darwin Convention Centre (DCC), in conjunction with local host partner, the Faculty of Law at Charles Darwin University (CDU) and the local legal fraternity.

Darwin was subsequently short listed with three other destinations. In late 2024, site visits were undertaken by CLA representatives to each location to assess capacity, capability and destination appeal as well as meet key city and legal community contacts.

Key local support influences success

In January 2025, each destination was invited to present to the CLA Committee. The presentation included a compelling video highlighting Darwin and the inspiring NT, along with the

region's 65,000-year-old Aboriginal culture and the extensive support on offer. The video featured personal invitations from the NT Government's Attorney-General and Minister for Tourism and Hospitality, the Honourable Marie-Clare Boothby and the NT's Chief Justice, The Honourable Michael Grant.

In February 2025, Darwin was officially confirmed as the host destination for 2027.

"From the outset, the Commonwealth Lawyers Association was deeply impressed by the strength and unity of the Northern Territory's bidding team – a truly formidable group that included the Chief Justice of the Northern Territory, the Attorney-General and the Presidents of both the Bar Association and the Law Society," Brigid Watson, Secretary General of the CLA, said. *"Their collective commitment demonstrated not only outstanding support within the legal community but also the Northern Territory's enthusiasm to welcome the Commonwealth legal community."*

In April 2025, the NT Chief Justice accompanied by Professor Alan Berman, Dean of Law at CDU, travelled to the CLC in Malta to warmly invite

delegates to make the journey to the NT in 2027. Professor Berman had been selected for DCC's Bid Champion Grant program, for his enthusiastic support of the CLC bid.

Contributors to decision making

The extensive support from the NT Government and NT legal organisations strongly influenced the selection of Darwin such as the offer of the NT Supreme Court's Ceremonial Courtroom for the 2027 CLC Moot Competitions.

The 'Team Darwin' spirit, supportive NT community and Darwin's proximity to key Asian aviation hubs, also played their part. Making a meaningful connection to the NT's ancient Aboriginal culture through the Larrakia People, Traditional Custodians of the Darwin region, and learning about traditional Aboriginal Law, also showcased how the NT would be 'different in every sense' for the CLC Conference in 2027.

To learn more about Australia's Northern Territory, scan this QR code



By Vicky Koffa

Helsinki, Espoo & Vantaa: A Capital Region Built for Certainty

In a meetings market defined by volatility, the wider Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa region offers something that has become unexpectedly valuable, predictability. Not predictability in the sense of monotony, but in the far more strategic sense that infrastructure works, institutions are trusted, decision-making is clear, and organisers can plan with confidence. For associations and congress organisers working in a more unstable geopolitical and economic climate, those qualities are not central.

That sense of reassurance begins with the way the three cities work together. *“For us, there are no real borders,”* says Karoliina Ala-Opas, Head of Helsinki Convention Bureau at Helsinki Partners. *“An event may be located in Espoo or Vantaa, but we promote and support it as a Helsinki region bid.”* It is an unusually practical model of regional cooperation, and one that gives organisers access to a broader pool of venues, hotels, universities, transport connections and local partners without the friction of fragmented destination management.

Helsinki’s meetings offer is supported by a city-region that combines strong public institutions, a high-functioning transport network and a business culture where clarity is key. Helsinki also continues to rank highly for sustainability and quality of life. It leads the Global Destination Sustainability Index 2025, while Finland remains the world’s happiest country according to the 2026 World Happiness Report.

Easy access, without the friction

Air access remains one of the region’s strongest strategic advantages, and that places Vantaa at the heart of the story. Helsinki Airport continues to be presented as a major competitive asset for the destination, boasting the accomplishment of being the top airport in Europe for customer experience in the 15–25 million passenger category. The region also emphasises the ease with which delegates can move on from the airport into the city-region.

That matters because accessibility is not simply a matter of distance. It is also about what happens when people land. In the Helsinki metropolitan area, onward transfers are straightforward, distances are manageable, and the airport-city relationship is efficient. Vantaa is rightly considered as “a gateway to growth”, with the airport-to-centre journey described as taking under 30 minutes. That speed is one of

The visit and reporting in this article were organised within the framework of the KOKEMO - Congresses and Corporate Events as Drivers of Innovation and Sustainability in the Helsinki Capital Region project, co-funded by the European Union, Enter Espoo Oy, the City of Helsinki and the City of Vantaa.



Co-funded by
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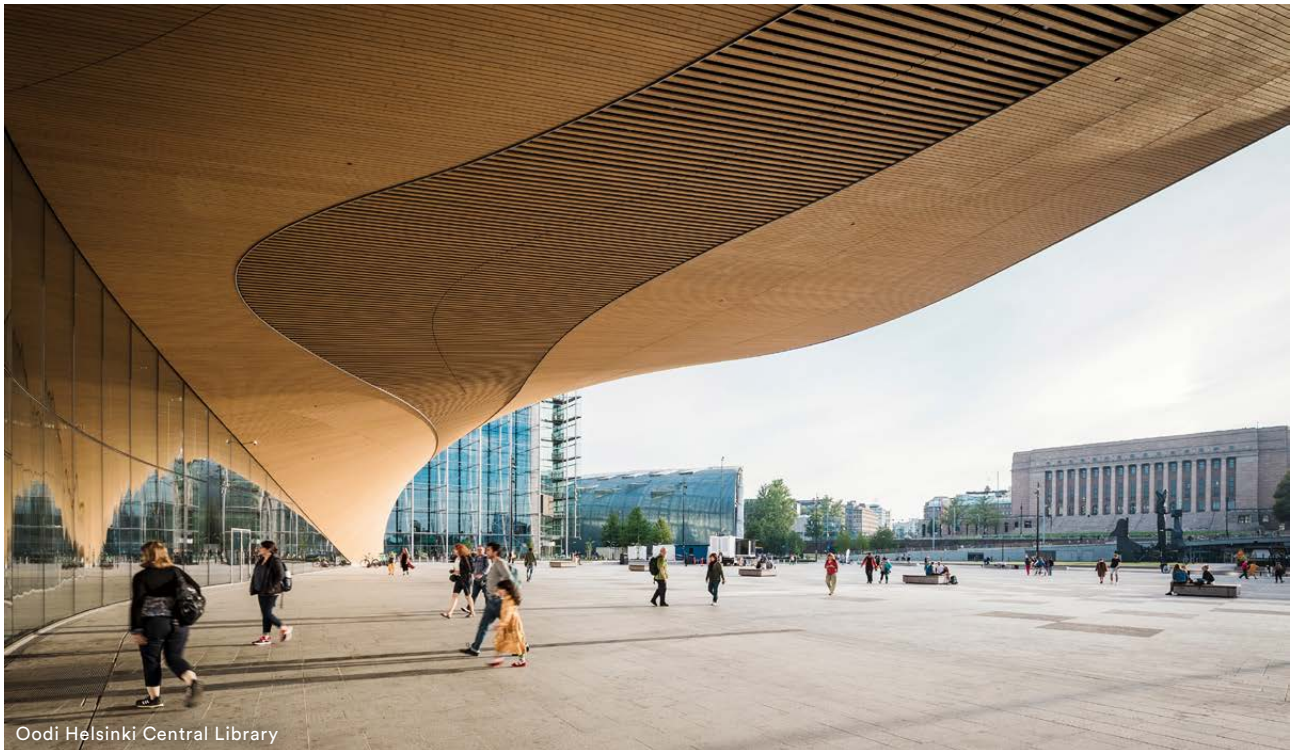


Helsinki-Uusimaa
Region



VISIT
ESPOO

Vantaa



Oodi Helsinki Central Library

the reasons the region works well for international congresses with delegates arriving from multiple markets.

Vantaa's role extends beyond transit. Around the airport, Aviapolis has matured into a practical business district with hotels and meeting infrastructure that support smaller conferences, executive meetings and event extensions. Clarion Hotel Aviapolis, for instance, offers 13 flexible meeting spaces, including a plenary-style room for up to 250 delegates.

A stable society in an unstable world

The wider Helsinki region's real strength lies in how predictably it performs. Ala-Opas confirmed: *"This is a boring country in the best possible way. Everything works. There are no surprises."* This mentality helps tackle risk management, delegate confidence and budget control, all aspects that associations need reassurance with when planning a conference.

The same idea runs through the way the destination supports organisers. *"We accompany clients from the first bid to the last delegate departure,"* says Heini Etsola, Senior Advisor, Congresses. *"That includes everything from building partnerships with local stakeholders to organising site visits and legacy initiatives."* This hands-on support reflects a destination culture in which convention bureaux are not simply sales teams, but active facilitators.

VENUES ACROSS THE REGION

Helsinki

- Messukeskus: Amfi Hall, up to 4,373 delegates, Arena up to 7,500 delegates
- Finlandia Hall: main auditorium, 1,672 seats
- Paasitorni: largest hall, up to 800 delegates

Espoo

- Dipoli: up to 1,000 delegates
- Otakaari 1: auditoriums for 70-600
- Espoo Metro Areena: up to 5,920 seats

Vantaa

- Clarion Hotel Helsinki Airport: up to 1,050 delegates
- Hilton Helsinki Airport: airport hotel with meeting facilities up to 336 delegates
- Clarion Hotel Aviapolis: largest room for 250



Solo Sokos Hotel Pier 4



Hotel Hanaholmen, Espoo

Helsinki strengths stress transparent venue pricing, no hidden charges for basic amenities such as air conditioning, and practical support from local teams throughout the planning process. Quite a straightforward offering.

Compact cities, strong experiences

One of the region's main advantages is its compactness. Delegates can combine congress participation with cultural experiences, waterfront moments and access to nature without having to dedicate hours to transfers. That blend of urban life and natural calm is often associated first with Helsinki, but it resonates just as strongly in Espoo and Vantaa.

In Espoo, the appeal is closely tied to knowledge, research and innovation. Home to Aalto University and major technology clusters, the city has built a clear proposition around intellectual relevance. *"In Espoo, we see international congresses as drivers of real change, not only economic but social and academic,"* says Miikka Valo of Visit Espoo. *"They help position our city as a centre of excellence while delivering long-term benefits to our local communities."*

That positioning is credible because the venue landscape is directly connected to the local knowledge ecosystem. Dipoli, in the Otaniemi campus area, offers capacity for up to 1,000 delegates, while Hanaholmen adds a waterfront conference-hotel setting that bridges Espoo and Helsinki.

A destination aligned with key sectors

Associations increasingly want destinations that match the substance of their field. On that score, the Helsinki region is well placed. Helsinki focuses on five core sectors in particular: artificial intelligence, quantum technology, healthcare, data centres and green hydrogen. What's more, the capital region is the second most innovative region in Europe.

Espoo adds further depth to that picture. The city says its innovation community generates the sixth-highest number of patent applications in Europe, while also positioning itself as one of Europe's leading quantum hubs. Aalto University also brings a broader academic and creative dimension, with its art and design ranked 9th globally in the latest QS subject rankings.

That profile gives the area a connection to associations well beyond logistics. A healthcare congress can connect with hospitals, researchers and public policy actors. A technology event can plug into Aalto University, startup ecosystems and applied innovation environments. A sustainability-focused meeting can draw on a city-region already using environmental performance as a practical differentiator.

Events in the region also show how a congress can align with local expertise and create wider value. The European Academy of Neurology chose Helsinki not only as a host city for a major medical gathering, but also as a platform for legacy, supporting an annual brain health competition

in Finnish schools. The 18th European Public Health Conference, held in Helsinki in November 2025, was another natural fit, reflecting the region's strengths in healthcare, research and public policy. In Espoo, MyData 2025 at Dipoli highlighted the capital region's relevance for digital governance, innovation and technology-led debate.

Functional venues, not just attractive ones

Across Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa, organisers can choose from a wide range of practical venues. The region has five major conference centres capable of hosting congresses (the biggest one up to 20,000 delegates), alongside 15,000 hotel rooms in Helsinki itself and a further 7,000 in the neighbouring cities. Noteworthy is that all major conference venues in the region hold an environmental certificate.

Flexibility is also important. The region works for major international congresses, yet it is equally comfortable with specialist scientific gatherings, executive forums and multi-site formats. Finlandia Hall's return has strengthened the capital's premium venue mix, while Messukeskus continues to provide large-scale congress and exhibition capacity. Espoo adds campus-connected conference settings, and Vantaa contributes airport-adjacent practicality.

The area's uniqueness is also seen in unexpected venues like the two National Parks, Nuuksio and Sipoonkorpi. Nuuksio is the more developed with meeting facilities and it's also possible to organise a conference in the Finnish Nature Centre Haltia for around 200 people.

What delegates notice

Delegate feedback adds weight to the region's wider case. According to Helsinki's delegate survey, in 2025, 95% of respondents rated their overall satisfaction with Helsinki at 4 or 5 out of 5, and 83% said they would recommend it as a congress destination.

Just as useful are the comments behind the scores. Delegates repeatedly mention how easy the city is to navigate – *"Everything was in easy reach"* and *"Public transport efficient and punctual"* – while others underline the atmosphere with remarks such as *"People are very friendly and helpful"* and *"Beautiful, clean, safe."* The survey also found that 60% felt their event had greater professional value because it was held in Helsinki, which suggests that the destination is contributing not only to comfort and convenience, but to the quality of the congress experience itself.

To find out more about the wider Helsinki region visit www.myhelsinki.fi/business / www.visitespoo.fi/en/business-events, and www.vantaa.fi/en

BY THE NUMBERS

20,000

Maximum congress capacity in Helsinki's major conference centres.

15,000

Hotel rooms in Helsinki.

7,000

Additional hotel rooms in the surrounding metropolitan area.

100%

All major conference venues in Helsinki are environmentally certified.

93%

Delegate satisfaction score of 4/5 or 5/5 in Helsinki's 2024 delegate survey.

#1

Helsinki's position in the Global Destination Sustainability Index 2025.



Kallotorni

© Sanna Gulichsen

By Remi Deve

How Latin America Is Rewriting the Business Events Map

From Rio de Janeiro to Santiago, a continent somewhat overlooked by the global meetings industry is claiming its place at the table - and GL events Latin America is helping build it.

For much of the last century, the geography of international business events was reassuringly predictable. Europe dominated. North America followed. The rest of the world made occasional appearances. That map is being redrawn; and Latin America is one of the most compelling stories of the redrawing.

The continent's macro picture has been shifting for years: a growing middle class, rapid urbanisation, expanding digital infrastructure, and a generation of cities investing seriously in their international standing. Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Chile and Argentina are increasingly sophisticated destinations with the infrastructure, the institutions and the ambition to compete on the global stage.

For the business events industry, this shift carries particular weight. Conferences and congresses are not merely reflections of a destination's standing; they actively contribute to it. They bring knowledge, networks and economic activity that compound over time. A single major international congress can catalyse research partnerships, attract investment and

elevate a city's global profile in ways that take years to fully materialise. Latin America is waking up to this logic, and its governments, convention bureaux and venue operators are acting accordingly.

The Business Events Dividend

The economic case for attracting international meetings is not subtle. Business event delegates are among

the highest-spending visitors any destination can attract. Milena Palumbo, CEO of GL events Latin America, is direct about the differential: *"Business travelers typically spend four times as much as leisure travelers, extending their stay in the city and even bringing their families along, which directly impacts other sectors such as transportation, hospitality, and food services."*

The data underpins the ambition. According to the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), Brazil ranked third in the Americas for congresses in 2024, recording a 50% increase in the number of events hosted. It is also worth noting that Brazil entered the Top 15 of the Global Country Ranking in 2024. That is a remarkable trajectory for a market that, not long ago, was regarded as logistically complex and infrastructurally inconsistent.

What has changed? A combination of structural investment, improved air connectivity, institutional strengthening of convention bureaux, and, crucially, the arrival of professional venue operators capable of delivering the quality and consistency that



Lagune Barra Hotel



Riocentro Convention Center

international associations demand. Price competitiveness plays a role too. As Palumbo notes, Latin American destinations “typically offer significant value for money compared to traditional markets such as Europe and North America, in addition to unique attributes linked to cultural diversity and the experiences they provide to business travellers.”

GL events: Two Decades of Building the Foundation

Few companies have invested more consistently in the region’s business events infrastructure than GL events. The French group, which today operates a portfolio of more than 80 venues in 12 countries, acquired the concession for the Riocentro exhibition and convention complex in Rio de Janeiro in 2006. What followed was two decades of deepening commitment.

The group has invested R\$2.1 billion in Brazil alone – a figure, as Palumbo notes, “well above the market average, particularly for the renovation of the venues we manage.” That investment has funded the transformation of Riocentro into a world-class

convention campus, the development of an integrated midscale hotel on site, and most recently the sweeping renovation of the Anhembi District in São Paulo, which is now the largest exhibition and events complex in Latin America at 500,000 m², operating under a 30-year concession.

The results have been significant. In 2022, GL events reported a new revenue record driven in part by a tripling of its South American activity. The Anhembi District closed out 2025 with approximately 130 events and more than 2.5 million visitors.

Christophe Cizeron, Chairman & CEO for GL events Venues, frames the group’s Latin American strategy in clear terms. “Latin America already represents one of the most advanced and structured international development areas for GL events in venue management,” he says. “The region has moved from a growth market to a core operational pillar within the Group’s global Venues strategy.”

The approach is not simply about operating buildings. What distinguishes GL events’ model is the deployment of all three of its business lines in tandem: venue management through GL events Venues, event creation and exhibitions through GL events Exhibitions, and operational services through GL events Live. The effect, Cizeron explains, is “a virtuous cycle”: venues attract events, events generate demand, and the integrated services capability ensures delivery quality at every level.

RIOCENTRO: LATIN AMERICA’S FLAGSHIP CONVENTION CENTER

Located within Rio de Janeiro’s Barra Olímpica district, Riocentro remains the country’s best known convention complex – and a symbol of how long term investment can transform a legacy facility into a modern events campus.

Built in the 1970s and renovated for the 2016 Olympic Games, Riocentro covers a total of 571,000 m² of space, with 87,000 m² of exhibition halls across four pavilions, and a 14,000 m² convention centre with a main auditorium for up to 8,000 people and modular spaces for smaller sessions. Adjoining is the Lagune Barra Hotel with 306 rooms. The site also offers 7,000 parking spaces, direct BRT links to Rio’s airports.

Recent enhancements focus on sustainability: expanded natural lighting, waste reduction measures, and hybrid event capabilities. Its waterfront parkland and proximity to Rio’s beaches create an appeal few urban venues can match.

As he puts it, this integrated approach allows the group *“not only to manage venues, but also to stimulate demand through exhibitions and large-scale events, reinforcing venue attractiveness.”*

Beyond Brazil: The Continental Ambition

Brazil remains the anchor, but the group's gaze has widened. Chile has emerged as the second major operational hub, with GL events

now managing both of the country's principal venues (the Metropolitan Santiago and Espacio Riesco, Exhibition & Convention Center) and establishing a growing track record of attracting international congresses. Recent highlights include hosting Aquasur, the world's leading aquaculture trade show, and the 28th IFSO World Congress (organised by Kenes), the first time that obesity surgery congress had been held in

Chile, drawing approximately 3,000 international attendees.

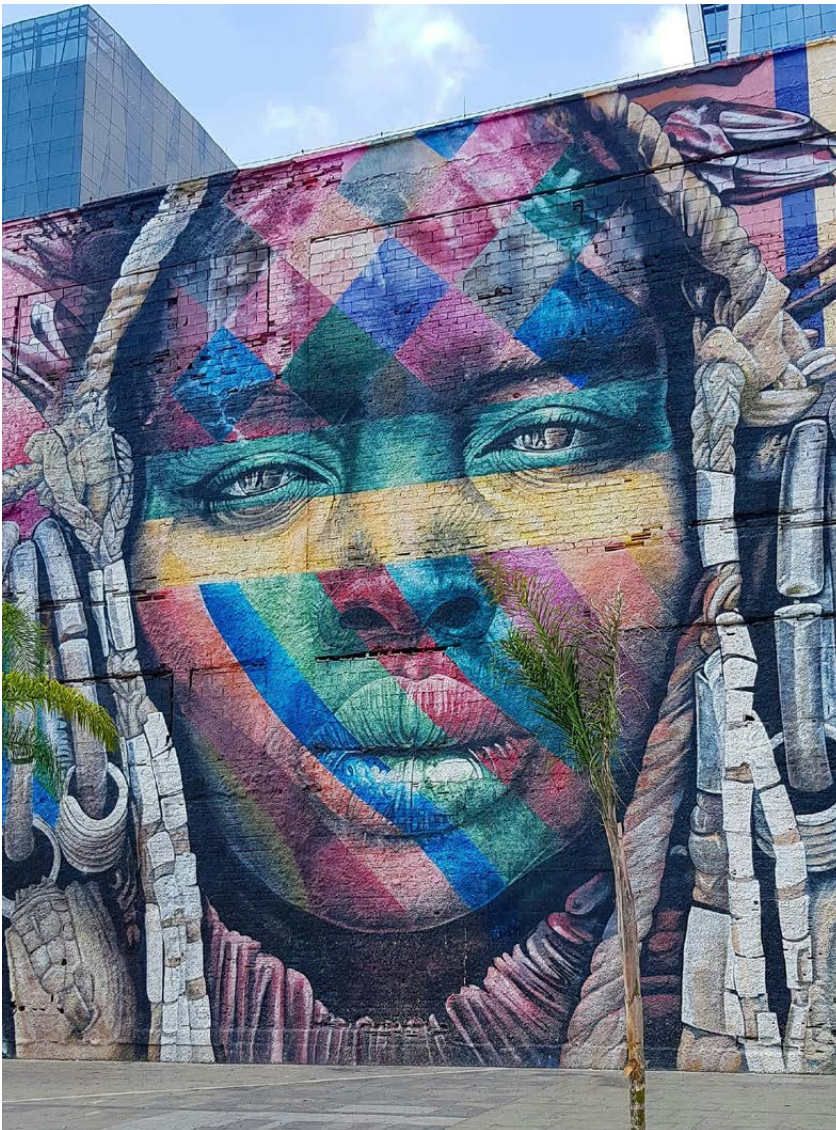
“Chile, especially Santiago, is emerging as a key growth driver, with modern infrastructure, international connectivity, and a growing reputation for attracting conferences,” says Palumbo. The country's political stability, strong institutional frameworks and strategic geographic position make it a natural second anchor for regional expansion.

Across the continent, the group is also monitoring the development of markets at earlier stages of the journey – markets, Palumbo notes, that today resemble *“what Brazil experienced at the beginning of its journey in the sector.”* The implication is clear: the playbook that worked in Brazil, a long-term concession model, integrated service delivery, and close partnership with public authorities, is replicable. Growth in the Anhembi district is projected to be 25% in tradeshow and conventions. When the first Brazilian edition of Hyvolution, the French hydrogen sector trade show, arrives at Anhembi this year with 7,000 expected visitors and 200 exhibitors, it will be another data point in the group's argument that Latin America is ready for the global calendar.

WSAVA 2025: A Congress That Proved the Point

If you wanted a single event to illustrate Latin America's arrival as a serious player in the international congress calendar, the 50th World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) World Congress would be a strong candidate. Held at Riocentro in September 2025, organised by PCO Kenes Group and hosted by GL events at the venue, it was a congress that tested the region's capacity and, by most measures, passed with distinction.

The numbers alone were impressive: 5,245 delegates from over 90 countries, 359 individual scientific



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Riocentro Convention Center



WSAVA 2025



Espacio Riesco, Santiago, Chili

sessions across 12 parallel streams over three days, and simultaneous translation in English, Portuguese and Spanish. But WSAVA 2025 was more than a large congress. It was an unprecedented triple-congress, running simultaneously with the Brazilian ANCLIVEPA Congress and the FIAVAC (Ibero-American Federation of Companion Animal Veterinary Associations) Congress, a logistical feat that demanded both scale and operational precision.

The vast Riocentro campus, with its interconnected pavilions, open park setting and integrated hotel, provided the physical infrastructure that made the format possible. For GL events Latin America, the congress demonstrated the full value of its integrated service model: venue management, hospitality and live marketing all deployed in concert. *“The operation relied on the integrated services, including venues, hospitality, and live marketing, ensuring the delivery of a high-quality experience,”* says Palumbo.

The congress was also notable for a sustainability agenda that broke new ground for WSAVA. It was the first edition to undergo a comprehensive carbon footprint assessment – using

the Trace platform – and to produce a formal Sustainability Report. Single-use materials were eliminated where possible, e-posters replaced printed ones, catering shifted to a plant-forward model, and a partnership with exhibitor VETNIL generated over 7.5 tons of pet food donated to local communities. Air travel, accounting for nearly 95% of total emissions given the global attendance profile, was identified as the dominant challenge, an honest acknowledgement that sets a meaningful baseline for future editions.

The final morning opened with an afro-Brazilian samba session in aid of the Pro Salus Foundation, a reminder that the best international congresses do not merely arrive in a destination, but engage with it.

A Destination-Driven Strategy

What GL events is building in Latin America is something more considered than a portfolio of venues. It is, in Cizeron's framing, a *“destination-driven strategy”*, one in which venue

management serves as a catalyst for broader economic development, working in close partnership with public authorities, convention bureaux and local industries.

The pipeline at Riocentro illustrates the point. Seven international events new to Latin America in two years. An AIDS congress alone expected to bring 8,000 foreign visitors to Rio de Janeiro. These are the downstream consequence of sustained investment, credible infrastructure and the organisational capacity to deliver consistently at international standard.

For international associations considering their congress rotation, the calculus is changing. Latin America is no longer a speculative choice or a regional gesture. It is a continent with modern convention infrastructure, price competitiveness, rapidly improving connectivity, genuine destination appeal – and, increasingly, an operator on the ground capable of delivering the experience its cities are promising.

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By Remi Deve

Where the City Becomes the Venue

In the heart of Brussels, a new initiative is redefining how international associations engage with the city: Brussels Convention Street.

Leaving SQUARE – Brussels Convention Centre, participants step out onto the Mont des Arts, the Belgian capital's cultural district. Within minutes, they find themselves in another setting entirely. Not a different neighbourhood, but a different atmosphere. A plenary session gives way to a gallery, a workshop to a library hall, a networking break to a museum terrace. There are no buses waiting, no transfers to coordinate. The event simply unfolds as people move.

This is the premise behind Brussels Convention Street: not a single venue, but a sequence of places that function as one.

At its core is proximity. The BOZAR, the KBR – Royal Library of Belgium, the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium and the BELvue Museum are not connected by corridors or infrastructure, but by the simple fact of being there – side by side, within walking distance. Together, they offer scale: up to 25,000 sqm of event space, 9,000-pax capacity and 40 different meeting rooms. But what defines them is how easily one flows into the next, with a thoughtfully redesigned district with improved public spaces, greener areas and pedestrian-friendly pathways.

For organisers, this reshapes the logic of an event. A morning keynote can take place in a high-capacity auditorium at SQUARE – Brussels. Minutes later, smaller groups disperse across neighbouring institutions, each space lending its own tone: the quiet authority of a library, the openness of a museum, the intensity of an arts venue. In the evening, participants gather again, perhaps under the glass canopy of BELvue or among the collections of the Royal Museums.

Nothing feels fragmented. The city itself provides continuity.

There is also a subtle shift in how participants engage. Movement is no longer an interruption between sessions; it becomes part of the experience. Conversations continue on stairways, across terraces, along the pathways of the Mont des Arts. Encounters happen not only in meeting rooms, but in the spaces between them.

This physical closeness carries practical consequences. Without the need for transport, schedules are lighter, transitions are smoother, and the environmental footprint is reduced.



More importantly, it allows organisers to design programmes that are both structured and fluid, adapting to different formats without logistical strain.

What emerges is not just a concentration of venues, but a different way of using a city. Brussels Convention Street demonstrates that when institutions align geographically as well as operationally, the boundaries between them begin to dissolve.

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By Vicky Koffa

Barcelona's Legacy Playbook Takes Shape with ECTRIMS 2025

For association leaders, the question is no longer whether a congress should leave a legacy, but what kind of legacy is credible, useful and measurable once the final session has ended. Barcelona Convention Bureau's work around ECTRIMS 2025 suggests a more focused model: start with the subject matter of the congress, identify a local challenge that genuinely connects to it, and build partnerships that can outlast the event itself.

Launched in early 2025, the Barcelona Convention Bureau Legacy Program was designed to generate long-term value in the territory through the congresses and events hosted in the city. Its first-year results already indicate a specific methodology rather than isolated initiatives. Five events generated positive local impact, 15 collaborations were established with local partners, more than 650 community members and 58 students took part in related actions, two long-term projects were created, and four existing local initiatives were brought into international congress settings.

The ECTRIMS 2025 case is one of the clearest examples of that approach. Held in Barcelona from 24 to 26 September 2025, the congress of the European Committee for Treatment and Research in Multiple Sclerosis brought together more than 9,600 international researchers, clinicians and healthcare professionals working on multiple sclerosis and related conditions. Yet the real interest of the meeting lies not only in the scientific programme but in what Barcelona and its partners built around it.

The legacy strategy responded to two very specific challenges. The first was how to bring the congress's scientific advances closer to patients and encourage them to play an active role in shaping the research that affects their future. The second was how to address stigma in the workplace and improve awareness of the professional capabilities of people living with MS, particularly given the low employment rates associated with the condition.

Extending the scientific conversation to patients

The first strand built on an existing ECTRIMS initiative. The ECTRIMS Patient Community platform operates year-round, connecting people living with MS and related neurological conditions with reliable, up-to-date scientific information. It positions itself as a bridge between the scientific community and the wider MS community, extending the reach of congress knowledge beyond the venue and into everyday life. The platform works with more than 40





patient advocacy organisations worldwide, underlining the scale of the ecosystem already surrounding the initiative.

Within that framework, the fourth edition of Patient Community Day was held on the final day of the Barcelona congress, both in person and online. Sessions covered diagnosis, emerging therapies, rehabilitation, lifestyle strategies, nursing support and a series of research hot topics, including biomarkers, cognition, genetics, imaging and artificial intelligence. The format also created space for lived experience, allowing patients to put questions directly to specialists and contribute perspectives of their own.

The scale of participation shows why this was important. According to the legacy project summary, 320 people attended on site and 2,063 joined online. ECTRIMS subsequently published a Patient Community Day impact report, extending the educational value of the event beyond a single day and reinforcing the idea that informed patients are part of the conversation around scientific progress.

As ECTRIMS President Bruno Stankoff explains, the organisation's mission extends well beyond its flagship congress: *"Over the past four years we have established a Patient Community Day, where we share the latest insights from the research presented at the congress with the patient community. It creates a space where patients, patient organisation representatives, clinicians and researchers can come together, exchange views, and stay focused on what ultimately matters most: advancing research that makes a real difference for patients."*

Turning congress relevance into local action

Barcelona Convention Bureau, however, did not stop at supporting an established patient-facing initiative. It sought to create something rooted more firmly in the city's own community.

That second strand took shape through collaboration with Fundació Esclerosi Múltiple, Esclerosis Múltiple España. Together, the partners developed an online training programme for Barcelona's business community aimed at breaking down stigma around MS and helping employers build more inclusive workplaces.

Delivered through short modules, the design of the training includes guidance and tools for companies on recruitment, onboarding and the support of employees who are diagnosed after joining an organisation. It was presented on 13 November and made available via Barcelona Activa, the city's local development agency, whose mission is to promote quality employment, entrepreneurship and business competitiveness within a sustainable and inclusive economic model. More than 40 people attended the launch session and received a guide on managing talent with MS.

A case study in destination-association alignment

That local talent was key to the project's direction. Rosa Masriera, Executive Director of Fundació Esclerosi Múltiple, notes that there are 12,000 people living with MS in Catalonia and that many are only able to keep their jobs for around ten years after diagnosis. In that context, she sees the training as a way to connect the latest advances presented at ECTRIMS with practical change in Barcelona, giving companies accessible and reliable information so that inclusion is effective in day-to-day working life.

For Christoph Tessmar, Director of Barcelona Convention Bureau, this reflects a broader evolution in how hosted events are understood. *"Events hosted in Barcelona are increasingly becoming drivers of long-term value rather than one-off activities,"* he says. They contribute to knowledge exchange, community development and sector growth, while local organisations gain visibility and new partnerships.

The ECTRIMS 2025 legacy project demonstrates that legacy is most persuasive when it is specific, co-designed and capable of being tracked over time. Barcelona Convention Bureau and its local stakeholders now plan to monitor organisational uptake of the training and the changes local patients perceive in employment integration and workplace adaptation.

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

By Remi Deve

Building Capacity, Shaping Futures at Prague Congress Centre

Long-term thinking has always been embedded in the logic of association meetings. Congresses are rarely planned for the present moment alone; they are positioned years ahead, aligned with scientific cycles, institutional strategies, and the evolving needs of global communities. It is within this forward-looking framework that the transformation of the Prague Congress Centre should be understood.

The planned expansion of the venue – centred on a new exhibition hall scheduled for completion in 2029 – is not simply a matter of additional space. It reflects a broader recalibration of what large-scale congress infrastructure must deliver: integration, flexibility, and the capacity to host complex formats that merge science, industry, and engagement.

Anticipating the Next Format of Congresses

Across disciplines, large international meetings have evolved into multi-layered platforms. Scientific sessions coexist with

exhibitions, symposiums, live demonstrations, networking environments, and social programming that must function as a cohesive whole. This evolution places new demands on venues, particularly in terms of spatial continuity.

The addition of a 5,000 m² exhibition hall at the Prague Congress Centre responds directly to this shift. Once completed, the venue will offer a total of 21,000 m² of exhibition space and an overall capacity of up to 15,000 participants, positioning it among the most substantial congress complexes in Central Europe.



More importantly, the expansion is conceived as a seamless extension of the existing structure. Rather than dispersing activities across multiple locations, the design allows organisers to maintain all components of a congress within a single, connected environment. This continuity simplifies logistics, but it also shapes the experience of delegates, enabling a more fluid interaction between sessions, exhibitions, and informal exchanges.

As Lenka Zlebkova, CEO of Prague Congress Centre notes: *“What we are building is not just additional capacity, it is continuity. Large congresses today require spaces that work together, where delegates, content and partners can move without interruption. Our ambition is to create a venue where everything connects naturally.”*

A Venue Embedded in the City

This notion of connection extends beyond the building itself. One of the defining characteristics of the Prague Congress Centre is its location, unusual in a European context where large venues are often situated on the periphery.

Positioned above a metro station and within minutes of the historic core, the venue allows participants to move easily between the congress environment and the city. The proximity of landmarks such as Vyšehrad reinforces this relationship, offering immediate access to cultural and historical settings without the need for organised transport.

This physical integration contributes to the overall attractiveness of Prague as a congress destination. Ranked among the top cities globally for international association meetings, Prague combines accessibility, safety, and cultural depth with a strong academic and scientific base.

Modernisation as Strategic Alignment

The expansion project is part of a wider investment programme that includes upgrades to stage technology, audiovisual systems, and hybrid broadcasting capabilities. These developments reflect the continued importance of technical performance in delivering high-quality congress experiences.

The ability to support live streaming, remote participation, and advanced production formats is integral to how associations extend their reach and maintain relevance across dispersed audiences.

At the Prague Congress Centre, these upgrades are framed as components of a coherent strategy. The aim is to ensure that the venue remains aligned with the evolving expectations of organisers while maintaining operational reliability.

Sustainability as Structural Principle

Alongside capacity and technology, sustainability forms a central pillar of the development. The new exhibition hall is designed to achieve LEED Gold certification, incorporating energy-efficient systems, water management solutions, and expanded green areas.

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- Total exhibition capacity: 21,000 m²
- Total capacity: up to 15,000 delegates
- Flexible layout: divisible into up to 5 independent sections
- Large-scale gala capability: up to 1,500 seated guests

What is notable here is the integration of sustainability into the core of the project, rather than its addition as a secondary feature. This reflects a broader shift within the meetings industry, where environmental considerations are increasingly embedded in decision-making processes.

For association planners, this alignment supports the delivery of events that meet both organisational objectives and societal expectations.

Continuity & Projection

Ultimately, the significance of the Prague Congress Centre's transformation lies in its capacity to project the destination into the future of meetings.

It acknowledges that congresses are dynamic environments where content, technology, and human interaction intersect. It recognises that venues must function not only as hosts, but as frameworks that enable these interactions to unfold.

In this sense, the expansion is all about redefining how that space is used. For Prague, it is also a statement of intent: to remain not only a leading destination for international meetings, but a place where those meetings can evolve.

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By Remi Deve

Latvia Turns Scale into Strategic Advantage

There is a certain clarity that comes with scale. In Latvia, distances are short, decisions are quick, and experiences feel concentrated rather than diluted. For international association planners, this compactness is a true operational advantage.

In a European meetings landscape often dominated by large, saturated capitals, Latvia offers something different: a destination where accessibility, affordability, and authenticity converge, supported by a quiet, yet sophisticated, infrastructure. As the country continues to position itself within the global meetings ecosystem, its appeal lies in delivering precision, that is of service, of experience, and of value.

This is not new territory. As Boardroom explored earlier in analyses of Latvia's economic clusters, the country has steadily built a reputation around niche strengths, from life sciences and smart materials to ICT and green technologies. What is now becoming increasingly clear is how these clusters translate into meaningful content for conferences, creating a compelling bridge between destination and discipline.

A Strategic Gateway with European Reach

Geographically, Latvia sits at a crossroads. Positioned between Northern and Eastern Europe, and within easy reach of major Western hubs, Riga acts as a natural gateway. Direct air connections link the city to over 90 destinations, while its airport, efficient and compact, ensures smooth arrivals and departures.

For planners, this translates into logistical ease. Transfers are short, venues are clustered, and the city itself is navigable within

minutes rather than hours. In practical terms, this means more time for content and networking, and less friction in getting participants where they need to be.

Yet Latvia's accessibility is not only physical. It is also financial. Compared to more established Western European destinations, the country offers highly competitive pricing without compromising on quality. This balance is increasingly attractive to associations managing tighter budgets while maintaining expectations.

A Portfolio of Venues with Character

Latvia's venue offering reflects its broader identity: diverse, layered, and rooted in both history and innovation.

In Riga, industrial heritage meets contemporary design at Hanzas Perons, a former railway warehouse transformed into a striking cultural space. Its raw architectural character makes it particularly suited to creative formats and networking events that benefit from atmosphere as much as functionality.

Equally distinctive is the Riga Circus, one of the oldest circus buildings in Europe, now reimaged as a flexible event venue. Its circular layout lends itself to unconventional setups, encouraging interaction and breaking away from traditional conference formats.



For larger-scale events, the ATTA Centre provides the capacity and technical infrastructure expected of a modern convention facility. With multiple halls and adaptable spaces, it anchors Riga's ability to host congresses and exhibitions at scale.

Historical venues also play a central role in Latvia's appeal. The House of the Blackheads offers a dramatic setting for gala dinners and ceremonial events, while the Small Guild and the Latvian Society House provide elegant backdrops steeped in cultural heritage.

Complementing these are high-quality hotel venues such as the Radisson Blu Latvia Conference & Spa Hotel and the Grand Poet Hotel, both offering integrated meeting facilities with accommodation, wellness, and dining under one roof, an increasingly important factor for associations seeking efficiency.

Beyond the Capital: A National Canvas

While Riga serves as the primary hub, Latvia's strength lies in its ability to extend the conference experience beyond the capital.

A short drive from Riga, the coastal resort town of Jūrmala offers a different rhythm. The Lielupe Hotel & SPA combines conference facilities with a wellness-focused environment, making it ideal for smaller meetings.

Further afield, regional venues add depth and diversity. The Latgales Gors in eastern Latvia and the Lielais Dzintars Concert Hall on the Baltic coast demonstrate how high-quality infrastructure is distributed across the country. Notably, Liepāja's designation as a European Capital of Culture in 2027 is set to further elevate its international profile.

In Sigulda, the Sigulda Devon Cultural Centre provides a scenic setting surrounded by nature, while the Rundāle Palace offers

a truly unique option for exclusive events – its baroque architecture and landscaped gardens creating an unforgettable atmosphere.

This geographical spread allows planners to design programmes that move beyond a single location, integrating multiple settings into one cohesive experience.

Nature as an Extension of the Programme

One of Latvia's most distinctive assets is its natural environment. With more than half of the country covered by forests, and a coastline stretching over 500 kilometres, nature is an integral part of the experience.

For association meetings, this opens up opportunities for meaningful post- or pre-conference tours. Whether it is a guided hike in Gauja National Park, a seaside retreat in Jūrmala, or activities in forested landscapes, Latvia enables organisers to incorporate wellbeing and sustainability into their events.

This aligns with a broader shift within the meetings industry, where participants increasingly value experiences that go beyond the conference room. In Latvia, these experiences are not manufactured, they are actually inherent.

Content-Driven Meetings: The Cluster Advantage

What sets Latvia apart is not only its venues or landscapes, but its intellectual infrastructure.

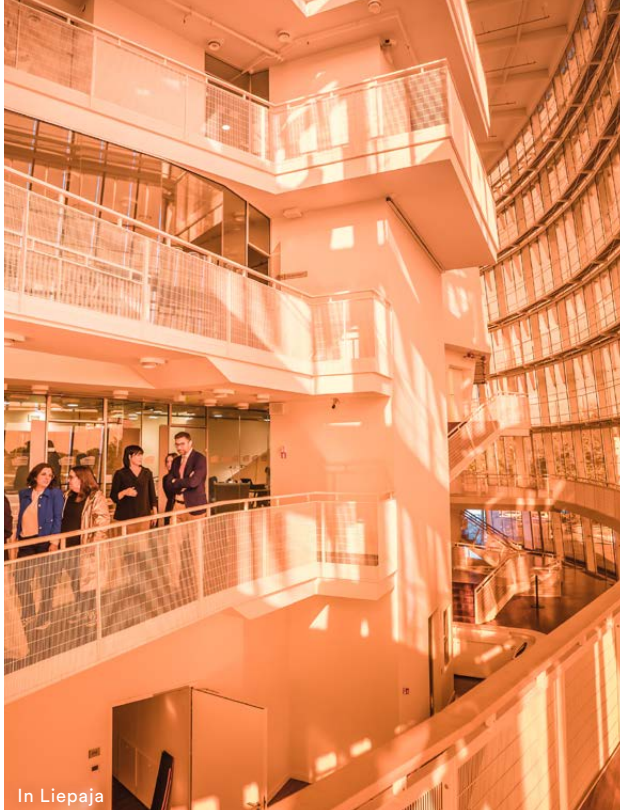
As highlighted in previous Boardroom coverage, the country has developed strong economic clusters that can directly support conference content. From biotechnology and medical research to fintech and digital innovation, these sectors are active, accessible, and open to collaboration.



Latgales Gors in eastern Latvia



Agenskalns Market



For international associations, this creates opportunities for deeper engagement. Local experts can contribute to programmes, site visits can be integrated into agendas, and partnerships can emerge organically. In this sense, Latvia offers a platform for knowledge exchange.

This is particularly relevant for associations seeking to align their events with local ecosystems, a trend that continues to gain traction globally. By anchoring meetings in real-world contexts, organisers can enhance both relevance and impact.

Service Culture and Operational Ease

Behind the scenes, Latvia's MICE offering is supported by a service culture that prioritises flexibility and responsiveness. The relatively small scale of the industry fosters close collaboration between stakeholders, from venues and hotels to local authorities and convention bureaus.

For planners, this often translates into smoother communication, faster decision-making, and a willingness to adapt. In an environment where agility is increasingly valued, these qualities can make a significant difference.

Moreover, Latvia's experience in hosting international events, combined with its multilingual workforce, ensures that global standards are met, while maintaining a distinctly local character.

More information : meetlatvia@liaa.gov.lv /
www.latvia.travel/en/mice-tourism

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Venue Capacity

- ATTA Centre: up to 5,500 delegates
- Wide range of venues from boardrooms (10–50 pax) to large congress halls (1,000+ pax)

Accommodation

- 8,000+ hotel rooms in Riga
- Strong presence of international brands and boutique hotels
- Many properties with integrated meeting facilities

Affordability

- Costs typically 20–30% lower than major Western European capitals
- Competitive pricing across venues, F&B, and services

Nature & Sustainability

- ~50% of the country covered by forests
- 500 km of Baltic coastline
- Easy access to nature-based programmes within 1 hour of Riga

Added Value for Associations

- Access to strong local industry clusters (ICT, life sciences, green tech)
- Opportunities for technical visits and knowledge exchange
- Flexible, collaborative local MICE ecosystem

By Remi Deve

When a Congress Becomes Infrastructure: The SRS Case in Strasbourg

Everybody knows it now: the value of a congress is increasingly assessed beyond attendance figures or immediate economic return. Its significance lies, rather, in its capacity to reshape ecosystems, accelerate knowledge circulation, and anchor territories within global networks of influence. The case of the 2025 Annual Meeting of the Society of Robotic Surgery (SRS), hosted in Strasbourg at the *Palais des Congrès* and IRCAD, offers a particularly instructive example of this shift.



Awarded the “Ville & Congrès de l’année – audience internationale” distinction by France Congrès et Événements, the event, which was bid on and won by Strasbourg’s Congress Centre & IRCAD, a global training and research centre for surgeons, was not simply recognised for its operational success. It was acknowledged as a manifestation of something more structural: the alignment between a scientific community, a local ecosystem, and a global agenda.

From Event to Systemic Impact

At first glance, the congress had all the attributes of a major international gathering: 2,500 participants from 70 countries, a strong industry presence, and a programme structured around cutting-edge developments in robotic surgery and minimally invasive techniques.

Yet what distinguished this edition is the extent to which it functioned as a platform for systemic transformation. The announcement of a global initiative co-led by the World Health

Organization, the IRCAD, and the SRS reframed the role of the congress itself. Rather than a space for dissemination alone, it became a site of institutional commitment.

The initiative addressed a well-documented global disparity: nearly half of the world's population lacks access to essential surgical care. By mobilising telemedicine, robotic systems, and digital platforms, it sought to reconfigure access to care across geographies where medical expertise is scarce. In this context, Strasbourg is positioned as a node within a global response to structural inequities in healthcare.

A Territory Shaped by Its Own Trajectory

This positioning reflects a longer trajectory that has progressively defined Strasbourg as a centre of medical innovation. The reference point remains the “Operation Lindbergh” in 2001, the first transatlantic telesurgery performed between New York and Strasbourg, a milestone that effectively inaugurated a new paradigm in surgical practice.

More than two decades later, the SRS congress reactivated this legacy as an operational continuity. Live demonstrations of transcontinental procedures (linking Strasbourg with Asia, the Middle East, and North America) extended the logic of telepresence into a new phase, where distance becomes increasingly irrelevant in clinical intervention.

In this sense, the congress amplified an existing ecosystem. The density of expertise concentrated around the IRCAD, described as the largest robotic surgery training centre globally, provided the scientific infrastructure upon which such events can build.

The discussions held in Strasbourg also reflected broader geopolitical concerns: workforce shortages in healthcare systems, unequal distribution of medical expertise, and the role of technology

in mitigating these imbalances. By facilitating exchanges between regions as diverse as Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, the congress contributed to the construction of shared frameworks for addressing global health challenges.

Measuring Territorial Impact Beyond Economics

The territorial impact of the SRS congress is measurable in conventional terms. Increased hotel occupancy, extended stays by participants and accompanying persons, and the activation of local service providers all contribute to the regional economy. Approximately 20% of attendees extended their stay, indicating a spillover effect into tourism and leisure activities across the Alsace region.

However, reducing impact to these metrics would overlook the more enduring transformations at play.

Firstly, the congress reinforced Strasbourg's positioning within what might be termed the “knowledge economy of cities.” With a university ranked among the world's leading institutions in human biology and a concentration of Nobel laureates, the city's scientific credibility is both validated and projected internationally.

Secondly, the event strengthened the integration between local actors, whether academic institutions, hospitals, industry partners, or event infrastructure. The ability to mobilise this ecosystem around a single event, with Strasbourg Events (Strasbourg Congress Centre) leading the way, was itself indicative of a mature territorial model, where collaboration is embedded rather than constructed ad hoc.

Finally, the congress contributed to what can be described as reputational capital. By hosting pioneering demonstrations and facilitating high-level announcements, Strasbourg consolidated its image as a site where the future of a discipline is actively shaped.



Ramona Fisher, Chief Marketing & Business Development Officer at Strasbourg Events, says: “Strasbourg was proud to host SRS 2025, continuing the tradition of excellence set by previous destinations Miami and Orlando. The congress proved that our city, and venues like Strasbourg Congress Centre, are central to the global exchange of scientific knowledge. More than just a meeting, SRS 2025 created a lasting legacy that will resonate within the healthcare community for years to come and already left a significant impact on our destination.”

The Infrastructure of Knowledge

The role of the *Palais de la Musique et des Congrès*, managed by Strasbourg Events, in this process is way beyond logistical. As an institution, it functions as an interface between global knowledge flows and local capacity. Its sustained recognition, both nationally and internationally, reflects an ability to accommodate events that are not only large in scale but complex in their requirements.

More broadly, the congress infrastructure in Strasbourg operates as part of a wider system, linking physical spaces with intellectual production. The proximity between venues, research centres, and clinical environments enables a level of integration that is difficult to replicate in more fragmented urban contexts.

More information:
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By Vicky Koffa

How Zurich Turned Obstetrics Expertise into Public Legacy

Legacy is often discussed in broad terms, but in Zurich it took on a very concrete form. Around *Masterclass Zurich 2026 - Vaginal Birth*, hosted by the Department of Obstetrics at University Hospital Zurich, the organising team created a public-centred initiative designed to bring specialist knowledge into the city itself. While the congress gathered around 200 senior physicians, specialists and midwives, mainly from the DACH region, the accompanying legacy project aimed to reach residents directly.

The thinking behind it was simple. The Department of Obstetrics explains that the subject of the masterclass was *“particularly well suited for a legacy project, because the standards and innovations discussed by medical professionals have a direct impact on healthcare delivery and decision-making for the population of Zurich”*. The ambition was to ensure that knowledge generated within the professional community did not stop there, but became useful beyond the hospital and beyond the congress setting.

Translating specialist insight into public understanding

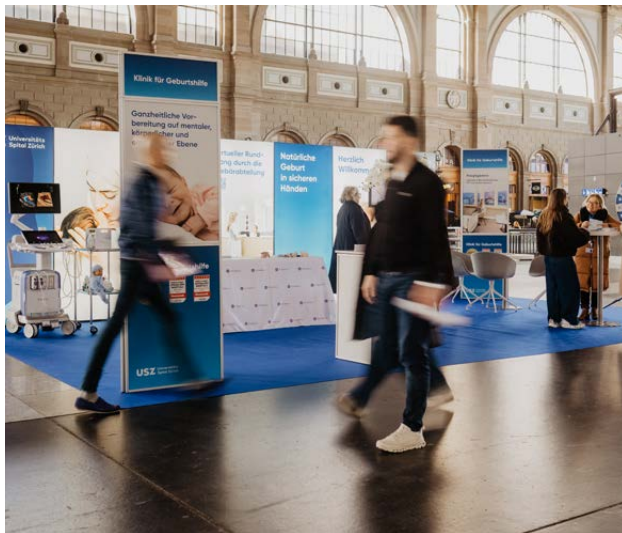
That ambition shaped the project from the start. In practice, that meant taking complex medical content from the symposium and presenting it in clear, accessible, and everyday language. The intended beneficiaries were expectant mothers and families seeking reliable, comprehensible information about pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum care.

The guiding principle was: *“Continuous information builds trust and strengthens public health literacy.”* The point was not simply to stage an outreach exercise, but to make medical expertise usable in real life, in a format that encouraged informed choices and more confident engagement with care.

The programme of the masterclass focused on physiological vaginal birth, labour induction, monitoring during labour, intrapartum ultrasound, biomechanics, assisted vaginal birth, shoulder dystocia and water birth. The faculty list brought together specialists from Switzerland, Germany, Portugal, Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom, showing the congress's international standing.

Obstetrics in the city

The legacy project took the form of an information booth at Zurich Main Station on 25 and 26 February 2026. Midwives and physicians were present for personal conversations, answering questions on pregnancy, childbirth and the postpartum period.



© Nina Brumm / Zurich Tourismus



© Nina Burm / Zürich Tourismus



The principal focus was vaginal birth, with practical information on natural birth processes, personalised birth planning and individual support. The activation also highlighted the obstetric services available through USZ and included selected partners presenting products, services and informational resources related to pregnancy and birth.

The choice of venue was a strong one. A railway station is public, visible and connected to daily life. It allowed the organisers to meet people where they already were, rather than expecting them to seek out information in a clinical environment. That matters in a field such as obstetrics, where questions are personal and urgent.

The role of partnership in delivery

The Department of Obstetrics also points to the role of the Zurich Convention Bureau in turning the idea into a workable format. They say the bureau played *“a crucial role in realising the project, offering support in logistics and location consulting”*. Just as importantly, the team contributed *“valuable input to the conceptual development of the format and helped reinforce Zurich’s position as a capable and professional host for medical conferences”*. Zurich Convention Bureau was not only helping to service an event, but enabling a form of legacy that connected the congress with the city around it.

The project also delivered some useful lessons. It was noted that *“fewer pregnant women were reached than expected”*, which suggests that the on-site targeting can be refined in future editions. Yet, *“the feedback from visitors was very positive, and the perception of both the clinic and University Hospital Zurich was strengthened”*. Through direct contact and the distribution of

informational material, the hospital was able to present itself as a leading academic institution in a way that felt approachable.

Another key challenge was *“ensuring that the concept of a legacy project was sufficiently embedded internally and that its added value was clearly understood.”* Not all staff were fully aware of the objectives or importance of maintaining a presence at the location. That has led to plans for deeper internal presentation after the event and stronger communication within the clinic.

The advice the Department of Obstetrics offers to others is useful: *“Involve speakers early on, prepare expert content in accessible language at an early stage, and use visual and illustrative materials to make complex topics more tangible”*. It was also stressed that *“internal communication about the purpose and value of a legacy project is crucial for success”*. In medical settings, indeed, organisers must remain aware that compliance rules, particularly in collaboration with pharmaceutical companies, can limit direct interaction with end users.

Zurich’s obstetrics initiative stands out because it treated legacy as a practical extension of the congress itself. It took a specialist subject, identified its public relevance, and created a format through which expertise could move into the wider community with clarity and care.

Looking to create a stronger legacy around your next conference or congress in Zurich? Connect with the Zurich Convention Bureau at congress@zuerich.com

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

By Vicky Koffa

Geneva Puts Brain Health at the Centre

When the 12th Congress of the European Academy of Neurology (EAN) convenes in Geneva from 27 to 30 June 2026 at Palexpo, it will bring more than 7,000 participants to the city across neurology and adjacent fields, from psychiatry and sleep medicine to epilepsy, migraine and nutrition. What gives this edition particular weight is the way the congress is being connected to a wider set of initiatives designed to leave a mark on the city and beyond.

As EAN Executive Director Anja Sander notes, Geneva was selected through an extensive RFP process that considers “*mainly economic, but also social factors plus such related to infrastructure*”, all of which help provide the basis for a sustainable congress. Beyond these practical elements, she adds, Geneva stands out as “*a global hub for health, policy, and international collaboration*”. For the association, that creates a particularly relevant setting in which scientific exchange can connect with broader societal and policy discussions around brain health.

A Destination Grounded in Science and Clinical Expertise

Geneva has the expertise and institutions to host a congress of this scale with real credibility. The city has built a strong reputation in life sciences and medical research, supported by an ecosystem that brings together academic excellence, clinical practice and innovation.

A central pillar of that ecosystem is Campus Biotech, a major neuroscience, neurotechnology and life sciences hub in the heart of Switzerland's Health

Valley. Designed to foster collaboration across disciplines and sectors, it brings researchers, clinicians, entrepreneurs and industry into one environment. That type of collaboration is important because the conversation taking place during the event is reinforced by an existing network of expertise. That ambition has been reinforced by the launch of neuro@campusbiotech, a new initiative designed to bring together neuroscience, neuroengineering and artificial intelligence and help position Geneva as a global hub for brain health.

That is equally true of the Geneva University Hospitals (HUG) and its Neurology Department. The city offers the kind of multidisciplinary setting that reflects the reality of modern brain health, where diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation and research are increasingly interlinked. In Anja Sander's words, “*Geneva offers more than strong logistics; it provides a setting where the congress can connect medicine, public health and international dialogue in a meaningful way.*”

Geneva as a European Capital of Brain Health

What distinguishes the Geneva edition most clearly is the effort to connect a specialist meeting with the wider public. The city has been named European Capital of Brain Health 2026, a designation that gives the congress a strong civic dimension. For two weeks, from 20 June to 4 July, messages promoting brain health are expected to appear across the city, including on public transport, at the airport, at the railway station, on posters and through visibility on the Mont-Blanc bridge.



The campaign is designed to make brain health part of everyday urban life rather than a subject confined to conference sessions. It promotes practical habits that support brain and mental health, including sufficient sleep, regular physical activity, a nutritious diet and an active social life.

For EAN, it is a natural extension of the Brain Health Mission, launched in 2023, which aims to raise awareness and drive action across Europe and beyond. The initiative demonstrates how international organisations and local partners can work together to create meaningful, lasting impact.

This approach aligns well with Switzerland's own positioning in the field. The Swiss Brain Health Plan 2023–2033 provides a national framework for raising awareness, encouraging prevention and improving coordination around brain health. That gives the Geneva programme more depth. The city is not using the congress to create a temporary communications theme but to build on existing medical and policy momentum. As Sander puts it, the designation reflects *“a shared commitment to advancing brain health at the community level”* and supports *“tangible actions that bring brain health closer to citizens”*.

Legacy That Extends Beyond the Congress Dates

The strongest evidence of a successful conference often lies in what continues after the closing session. Geneva's programme around the EAN Congress 2026 offers several examples of that thinking.

One of the most visible is Public Brain Health Day, which opens the conversation to patients, carers, healthcare professionals, representatives of non-profit organisations, educators, parents and anyone with an interest in brain health. Public lectures led by local professors will address topics such as headaches, epilepsy and sleep, making expert knowledge accessible to a



© Jan Greck

broader audience. During the Congress days, an event organised by the Swiss Neurological Society will focus on prevention and present the Swiss Brain Health Plan to the public. The EAN Public Brain Health Day will take place on 29 June during the congress.

For EAN, the value of the initiative lies in its ability to create, in Anja Sander's words, *“a space where science meets society”*. She also underlines that brain health is *“relevant to everyone”* and can be actively supported at every stage of life. By translating scientific knowledge into practical and accessible tools, Public Brain Health Day is intended to help people make informed decisions, strengthen links between healthcare professionals and the wider community, and help communities recognise the many opportunities that exist for maintaining brain health.

Then there is the Brain Health School Challenge, perhaps the clearest expression of legacy in action. Launching nationally in September and culminating with an award ceremony in November

during Swiss Neuroweek, the initiative invites young people across three age categories to develop ideas, strategies or campaigns that encourage their peers to prioritise neurological and mental health. The ambition is to make it an annual initiative. As Anja Sander explains, this is also part of a wider legacy model: the challenge first started during the Austrian Neurology Congress in 2024 and is now taking place in more than six countries, illustrating how activities launched around a congress can be replicated by host cities and organisations elsewhere.

For EAN *“legacy is created through the collective and sustained impact of multiple efforts”* and not one single initiative. She adds that meaningful legacy depends on collaboration and on creating activities that can later be taken up by host cities, host organisations and other entities. In that respect, Geneva is intended not only to strengthen its own role in promoting brain health and well-being within society, but also to act as an example for other cities working towards the title of Capital of Brain Health®.

To learn more about how Geneva is using EAN 2026 to advance brain health far beyond the congress floor, visit pro.geneve.com/en/meetings-conferences

More info on Switzerland as a convention destination:

myriam.winnepenninckx@switzerland.com / www.MySwitzerland.com/meetings

By Remi Deve

Montréal: An Open City For Global Science & Conferences

In recent years, the geography of international scientific collaboration has been quietly shifting. Changes in geopolitical dynamics, evolving research policies, and concerns about cross-border mobility have led some academic and professional communities to reconsider where they gather. Within this evolving landscape, Montréal has steadily strengthened its reputation as a reliable and open meeting ground for international associations.

Situated at the crossroads of Europe and North America, the Québec metropolis has long cultivated a dual identity. It combines the research intensity and infrastructure typical of major North American cities with a cultural and intellectual environment often described as distinctly European. Canadian Prime Minister, former Governor of the Bank of Canada and Governor of the Bank of England, once characterised Canada as *"the most European of non-European countries,"* a description that many observers believe applies most clearly to Montréal itself. For associations whose missions depend on international collaboration, such positioning matters. Scientific communities thrive on the free exchange

of ideas, mobility of researchers, and openness to diverse perspectives, i.e. conditions that cities must actively support if they wish to host major global gatherings.

A Dense Ecosystem of Knowledge

Montréal's standing as a scientific hub is rooted in its dense concentration of universities, laboratories, and research institutes. The metropolitan area hosts several globally recognised institutions and maintains one of the highest concentrations of students in North America.

The city also ranks first in Canada for university research funding, reflecting sustained investment from provincial and federal governments as well as strong links between academia and industry. This environment has encouraged cross-disciplinary approaches that bring together sectors such as artificial intelligence, life sciences, aerospace, and environmental research.

Such density creates fertile ground for international conferences, and associations seeking venues for knowledge exchange often benefit from it. Montréal's research ecosystem provides exactly a type of environment that enables events closely connected to the scientific communities they serve.

Over the past decade and a half, initiatives promoting open science and international research partnerships have played a role in raising Québec's global profile. Among them are efforts led by the province's Office of the Chief Scientist, Rémi Quirion, which has sought to strengthen scientific culture while building connections between researchers worldwide.

"Montréal stands out for its mix of academic excellence, cultural diversity, and international openness," says Mylène Gagnon, Vice President of Sales, Convention services and Members, Tourisme Montréal. *"The city offers the right environment, expertise, and spirit to bring people and ideas together from around the world."*

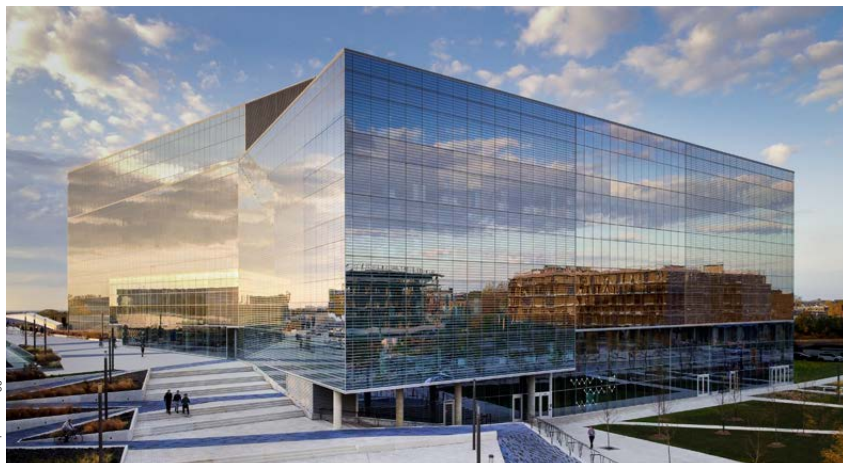
It comes as no surprise Montréal keeps attracting large-scale academic meetings. One example is the successful bid for the International Society for Children's Bone Health (ISCBH), scheduled for June 2026, an event that will bring leading researchers from across the world to the city.

A Meeting Point for International Organisations

Beyond its research institutions, Montréal hosts a significant number of



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international organisations. Nearly 70 international organisations, including six United Nations offices, have established a presence in the city. This places Montréal third in the Americas for the number of international organisations headquartered there.

For association leaders, such a concentration reflects a city accustomed to international governance, diplomacy, and multilateral dialogue. It also signals familiarity with the operational realities of international organisations, from multilingual environments to complex event logistics.

The presence of two major convention facilities, the BOMA BEST certified Palais des congrès de Montréal and Centre Mont-Royal, further strengthens the city's hosting capacity. Both venues are embedded within Montréal's compact downtown core, allowing delegates to move easily between conference sessions, hotels, restaurants, and cultural venues.

Diversity as an Everyday Reality

Equally central to Montréal's identity is its social and cultural diversity. More than 120 ethnocultural communities are represented in the metropolitan area, and 59% of residents are either immigrants or the children of immigrants. This diversity is reflected linguistically as well: more than 80 languages are spoken across the city.

For international delegates, this multicultural environment often translates into a sense of familiarity. Visitors arriving from Europe, Asia, Africa, or Latin America encounter a city where global cultures are visible in daily life, from neighbourhoods and restaurants to festivals and research communities.

MONTRÉAL AT A GLANCE

- #1 in Canada for university research funding
- Nearly 70 international organisations headquartered in the city
- 6 United Nations offices
- North America's top destination for international association meetings for 9 consecutive years (ICCA)
- 120+ ethnocultural communities represented
- Home to two major convention venues: Palais des congrès de Montréal and Centre Mont-Royal
- Home to McGill University, ranking among North America's top 15 best universities

At the same time, Montréal's bilingual character provides a practical bridge between continents. English and French serve as official languages, allowing the city to operate comfortably within both North American and European professional networks.

Safety also plays a role in shaping the delegate experience. Montréal regularly appears among the top ten safest cities in the world for travellers, according to Berkshire Hathaway Travel Protection, contributing to its reputation as a welcoming destination for large international gatherings.

A City Designed for Exchange

While infrastructure and research capacity are important, the broader urban environment also influences the success of international meetings. Montréal's dense urban core, accessible public transport, and vibrant cultural scene contribute to what many organisers describe as a "walkable congress experience."

Delegates often move seamlessly from academic sessions to informal networking in cafés, cultural venues, or public spaces. This blending of professional exchange and social interaction has long been considered one of the city's defining strengths.

For international associations, particularly those whose missions rely on collaboration across borders, the symbolic dimension of place can be as significant as logistics. Montréal positions itself as a city where dialogue, diversity, and intellectual exchange remain central values.

To learn more about hosting your next event in Montréal, visit meet.mtl.org or contact Alain Carbonneau, Manager, International Market, Business Events Montréal (Tourisme Montréal) at acarbonneau@mtl.org



By Remi Deve

Sarawak Expands its Convention Infrastructure Ahead of a Historic Milestone

With the BCCK2 expansion underway and a new state airline taking to the skies, Sarawak is making another ambitious move in the global business events arena

There is a particular kind of confidence that comes not from ambition alone, but from a track record. Kuching, the quietly compelling capital of Sarawak on the island of Borneo, has spent twenty years building exactly that. Since the Borneo Convention Centre Kuching (BCKK) first opened its doors in 2009, it has helped establish Sarawak as a credible host for international meetings, drawing delegates from across the world to one of Southeast Asia's most distinctive destinations.

Now, that credibility is being matched with infrastructure. The expansion of BCKK – currently known as BCKK2 – marks a defining moment in Sarawak's business events evolution. And the timing is no accident.

A Venue Ready for 2028 and Beyond

In 2028, Sarawak will host the International Water Association (IWA) World Water Congress & Exhibition, an event expected to draw more than 10,000 delegates from across the globe. It will be the first congress of its scale ever held in Sarawak, and one of the most significant international gatherings the region has seen. BCKK2 is being built, in no small part, to ensure that Sarawak is ready.

According to Rayner Simon, Chief Operating Officer at BCKK, the expansion was a response to growing demand that the existing facility could no longer comfortably contain. *"Since opening in 2009, BCKK has helped Sarawak build a credible track record in hosting international meetings, particularly in areas such as renewable energy, sustainability, healthcare and science,"* he explains. *"Over time, this has led to stronger interest from organisers looking at Kuching for larger events. The awarding of the IWA World Water Congress & Exhibition 2028 is one clear sign of that momentum. At the same time, demand is beginning to outgrow what the existing facility can comfortably support. That is why the expansion is taking place now."*

The expansion introduces 10,755 sqm of new event space, including a main hall, a multi-purpose hall and 20 breakout rooms, bringing the total number of breakout rooms across the complex to 34. Combined with BCKK1's 6,771 sqm, the integrated venue now offers 17,526 sqm of space, accommodating up to 15,000 delegates. With both buildings directly connected, BCKK1 and BCKK2 function as one seamless complex, enabling effortless flow between plenary sessions, exhibitions, concurrent tracks and networking engagements.

For event organisers, this connectivity matters enormously. Large-scale congresses are logistically complex: multiple sessions run simultaneously, exhibitors need space, sponsors need visibility, and delegates need to move efficiently. Simon describes the operational improvement plainly: *"With BCKK1 and BCKK2 linked directly, delegates can move more*

easily between plenary sessions, breakout rooms, exhibitions and other event spaces. This will help events run more smoothly, especially larger meetings where movement, timing and proximity matter."

For planners weighing events above 5,000 delegates, he adds, the calculus goes beyond headline capacity. *"They want to know whether the venue can support plenary sessions, breakout rooms, exhibitions, side meetings, sponsor activations and delegate movement in a practical way. BCKK2 gives Sarawak a stronger footing in that regard, especially for events that want everything to run within one connected venue environment."*

There is also a sense of place. The area in front of BCKK2 opens onto a sweeping view of the Sarawak River and the mangrove belt beyond, creating a natural backdrop for outdoor evening receptions and experiences that feel authentically Bornean, a quality that is difficult to manufacture in a world of interchangeable convention halls.

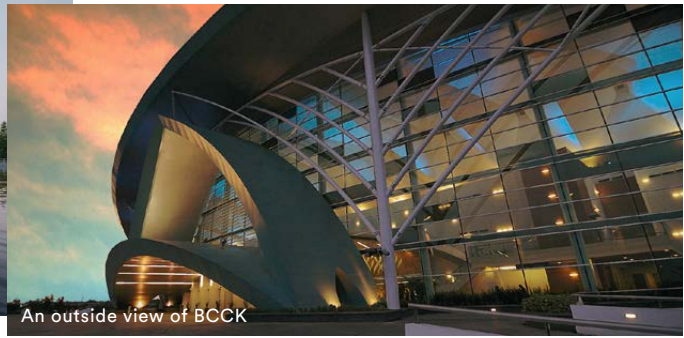


AIRBORNEO: OPENING THE SKIES TO SARAWAK

In January 2026, AirBorneo officially commenced operations following the Sarawak government's acquisition and rebranding of MASwings. Initially focused on Rural Air Services, the carrier is already looking well beyond that founding mandate.

Routes to Peninsular Malaysia are planned for 2026, with expansion across Southeast Asia to follow. A transition to jet operations is also underway, aimed at supporting higher-capacity regional travel. For the business events sector, a state-owned carrier with a mandate to strengthen Sarawak's economic connectivity is a strategic asset.

"AirBorneo will act as the connective backbone linking Kuching and Sarawak to key regional hubs, making the destination more accessible, reliable, and attractive for international conferences," says the airline's CEO, Megat Ardian. *"We aim to position ourselves as the gateway to Sarawak's business ecosystem, facilitating stronger international partnerships, opening trade corridors, and making it easier for global investors and companies to access opportunities in the state."*



An outside view of BCKK

A Destination With Something to Say

Behind Sarawak's expansion sits a policy framework that is ambitious in its specificity – and a business events organisation that has been instrumental in shaping it.

Sarawak's Post COVID-19 Development Strategy (PCDS) 2030 identifies business events as one of six key economic sectors driving the state's development. The strategy's vision – that by 2030, Sarawak will be a thriving society driven by data and innovation – is anchored in thirteen priority areas spanning energy transition, sustainability, digital development, healthcare and research.

These are precisely the sectors that international associations are most actively debating, researching and legislating. When an international congress arrives in Kuching, it is not visiting a destination that happens to host events. It is arriving in a place where the conversation it carries is already underway.

Business Events Sarawak (BESarawak) has formalised this alignment through its BESLegacy Initiative, a framework that embeds legacy impact thinking into every stage of event planning, measuring outcomes across three dimensions: Social, Economic, and Environmental (SEE). It is a model that has attracted international attention. Sarawak's legacy approach won the Outstanding Recognition in Communication Award at the ICCA Best Marketing Award, and in 2025, BESarawak launched ALLEGACY, Malaysia's first intelligent impact management system for the business events sector, developed in partnership with Universiti Malaysia Sarawak.

The numbers speak to the strategy's traction. Since integrating business events into the PCDS 2030, BESarawak has recorded a 100% success rate in event bidding and pitching. Some 50% of the 541 events secured between 2021 and 2025 are classified as legacy-driven.

In December 2025, the Sarawak government also deepened this commitment still further with the launch of the Business Events Sarawak Alliance (BESA) and the adoption of the Borneo Legacy Declaration, a shared commitment formulated by 36 policymakers and industry leaders from Malaysia and beyond. For Jason Tan Chin Foo, Acting CEO of BESarawak, the direction of travel is clear. "Collaboration has always been

the driving force behind Sarawak's success as a business events destination. Through our legacy impact initiatives and comprehensive support for business event organisers, we aim to strengthen the contributions of every industry player and foster meaningful partnerships that deliver lasting legacies for Sarawak, Malaysia and beyond. Our ultimate goal is to position Sarawak as the Legacy Capital of Business Events in Malaysia and Borneo."

A Long Game, Played Deliberately

What is striking about Sarawak's approach is its coherence. The expansion of BCKK, the launch of AirBorneo, the alignment of business events strategy with the state's development priorities... these are not isolated decisions. They are components of a longer-term play, one that is building toward 2028 while keeping an eye on the decade that follows.

The IWA World Water Congress will be both a test and a showcase. Successfully hosting an event of over 10,000 delegates will signal to the global associations community that Kuching has arrived as a serious contender for large-scale international meetings.

Simon is clear-eyed about what that means in practical terms: "BCKK2 strengthens Sarawak's longer-term position by giving the destination the ability to host larger meetings with greater confidence and relevance. It also supports Sarawak's ambition to be a place where international associations can do more than convene."

Tan concludes: "The expansion of the Borneo Convention Centre Kuching reflects where Sarawak is heading as a business events destination. It will significantly enhance our capabilities to host larger and more complex conventions in response to growing demand. The Sarawak Government places strong importance on business events as a catalyst for sector development, and beyond scale, we are leveraging these platforms to align with our broader economic priorities. Together, this signals the confidence organisers have in Sarawak, and the progress we've made in positioning Sarawak as a destination for events that truly make an impact."

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

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