Strategic Insights from

iMEX POLICY FORUM 2024

Roundtable Discussions

iMEX

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1.1. About Snapsight

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2. Executive summary

The **IMEX Policy Forum** brought together a diverse group of political representatives, destination managers, and business event industry leaders to discuss and redefine the principles of what makes a "good" meeting. This report showcases the strategic insights from the roundtable discussions. Key themes emerged around delivering high-quality, impactful content; fostering knowledge transfer; ensuring inclusivity; and leveraging interactive formats to enhance participant engagement. This forum highlighted the irreplaceable benefits of in-person meetings, such as deeper human connections, trust-building, and significant local economic and social impacts. It also emphasized the necessity for inclusive meeting environments, clear communication of objectives and outcomes, and the integration of sustainable practices.

To elevate meetings from "good" to "much better," participants strongly recommended better use of technology, improved event design, and a focus on sustainability and social impact. Effective communication strategies, particularly around the broader impact of meetings on society, are also crucial. The insights gathered point to a future where meetings are not just platforms for information exchange, but dynamic ecosystems fostering innovation, inclusivity, and long-term regional development.

2.1. Key insights:

⊙ **Meaningful, high-quality, impactful content:**
  • Focus on selecting well-prepared, engaging speakers and fostering impactful discussions that inspire and drive actionable insights.

⊙ **Knowledge transfer and regional capacity building:**
  • Encourage the transfer of global expertise to local contexts and emphasize long-term capacity building through targeted training and development programs.

⊙ **Inclusivity and accessibility:**
  • Address financial, travel, and spatial barriers to ensure diverse and inclusive participation. Provide bursaries and design flexible meeting spaces to accommodate various needs.

⊙ **Clarity of purpose and outcomes:**
  • Articulate clear objectives and measurable outcomes for meetings to align participant efforts and assess success effectively.

⊙ **Interactive and engaging formats:**
  • Shift from passive to active participation by using interactive session formats like workshops and roundtables to enhance engagement.

⊙ **Unique value of in-person meetings:**
  • Highlight the irreplaceable benefits of face-to-face interactions in building trust, networking, and fostering serendipitous discussions that drive innovation.

⊙ **Roles & responsibilities for inclusive meetings:**
  • Engage local industries and marginalized communities deliberately, ensuring diverse perspectives are integrated and inclusive participation is prioritized.

3. Key themes & questions

3.1. Basic principles of what makes a good meeting

The discussions revealed a multifaceted understanding of what constitutes a "good" meeting. Participants from diverse sectors provided rich insights that can be categorized into five primary themes: meaningful content, knowledge transfer, inclusivity, clarity of purpose, and interactive formats. These themes are not just theoretical ideals but are grounded in practical experiences and real-world applications.

3.1.1. Meaningful, high-quality, impactful content

A recurring theme was the necessity for meetings to deliver content that is not only high-quality but also meaningful and impactful. As one participant succinctly put it, "a good meeting transcends mere information exchange; it inspires, educates, and drives action."

- **High-quality presentations:** The quality of presentations is paramount. Participants emphasized the need for well-prepared, engaging speakers who can convey complex ideas clearly and compellingly. "The caliber of our speakers can make or break a meeting," noted a representative.

- **Impactful discussions:** Beyond presentations, the discussions that follow must be equally impactful. These discussions should challenge conventional thinking and stimulate innovative solutions. "Our goal should be to leave attendees with new perspectives and actionable insights," said an industry leader.

3.1.2. Knowledge transfer and regional capacity building

Meetings serve as vital conduits for knowledge transfer, bridging the gap between global expertise and local know-how. This process not only enriches the local knowledge base but also builds regional capacity.

- **Global to local knowledge transfer:** "Bringing global experts to engage with local stakeholders can catalyze regional development," observed a participant. This transfer of knowledge is crucial for building local expertise and fostering innovation.

- **Capacity building:** Meetings can help build regional capacity by equipping local professionals with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive. "Our focus should be on creating a lasting impact that extends beyond the meeting itself," emphasized a business event industry leader.

3.1.3. Inclusivity and accessibility

A good meeting is one that is inclusive and accessible to all participants, regardless of their background or circumstances. This inclusivity extends across multiple dimensions, including information, financial accessibility, travel, and flexible meeting spaces.

- **Financial and travel accessibility:** "We must ensure that financial constraints do not hinder participation," stated a moderator. Providing bursaries and subsidies can help bring marginalized communities to the table.

- **Flexible meeting spaces:** the design of meeting spaces should accommodate diverse needs, ensuring that everyone can participate fully. "From wheelchair accessibility to quiet zones for neurodiverse attendees, our spaces must be adaptable," suggested a destination representative.

3.1.4. Clarity of purpose and outcomes

Clarity in purpose and outcomes is essential for a meeting to be effective. Participants should have a clear understanding of the meeting's objectives and what it aims to achieve.

- **Defined objectives:** "Every meeting should start with a clear statement of purpose," recommended an attendee. This clarity helps align participants' expectations and focus their efforts.

- **Measurable outcomes:** Defining measurable outcomes allows organizers to assess the meeting's success. "We need to move beyond vague goals and establish concrete, measurable outcomes," argued a business event leader.

3.1.5. Interactive and engaging formats

The format of the meeting plays a crucial role in its success. Moving from a passive attendee model to an active participant model can significantly enhance the meeting experience.

- **Interactive formats:** "Interactive sessions, such as workshops and roundtable discussions, encourage active participation," noted a participant. These formats allow attendees to engage more deeply with the content and with each other.

- **Participant engagement:** "We need to think of attendees as participants, not just passive recipients of information," emphasized a moderator. Engaging participants actively leads to more meaningful and memorable experiences.

3.2. What meetings can achieve more effectively than alternatives

In an era where digital and remote alternatives have become increasingly prevalent, the unique value proposition of in-person meetings remains undeniable. The discussions highlighted several areas where face-to-face interactions excel over virtual alternatives, underscoring the irreplaceable benefits of physical gatherings.

3.2.1. Human connection and bonding

One of the most profound advantages of in-person meetings is the ability to foster genuine human connections. These connections are the bedrock of trust and collaboration, elements that are often diluted in virtual environments.

- **Deepening relationships:** "Nothing can replace the handshake, the eye contact, and the shared laughter that come with face-to-face interactions," remarked a business event leader. These moments of personal connection create stronger bonds and foster a sense of community.

- **Emotional engagement:** The emotional engagement that occurs in physical meetings is unparalleled. "The energy in a room full of passionate individuals is palpable and can drive collective action," noted a political representative.

3.2.3. Trust-building and networking

Trust is the cornerstone of effective collaboration, and it is built more effectively through face-to-face interactions. Networking opportunities at in-person meetings are more robust and lead to more meaningful connections.

- **Building trust:** "Trust is built through personal interactions, and these are much more effective in a face-to-face setting," emphasized a participant. In-person meetings allow for the nuances of communication—body language, tone, and immediate feedback—which are critical for building trust.

- **Expanding networks:** Networking in person allows for spontaneous conversations that can lead to unexpected opportunities. "The hallway chats and coffee break discussions often lead to the most valuable connections"

3.2.4. Serendipitous discussions and deeper engagement

In-person meetings provide a fertile ground for serendipitous discussions—those unexpected, unplanned conversations that can lead to breakthrough ideas and deeper engagement.

- **Unplanned interactions**: "Some of the best ideas come from chance encounters during a coffee break or a shared cab ride," mentioned a participant. These unplanned interactions are difficult to replicate in virtual settings.

- **Deeper engagement:** The ability to engage deeply on topics is enhanced when participants are physically present. "Being in the same room allows for more nuanced and in-depth discussions," said a moderator.

3.2.5. Exchange of tacit knowledge
Tacit knowledge—knowledge that is understood implicitly and often shared through personal experience—is more effectively exchanged in person.

- **Sharing experiences:** "In-person meetings allow for the sharing of tacit knowledge that is often missed in virtual settings," noted a business event leader. This includes the subtle insights and unwritten rules that are best conveyed through face-to-face interactions.

- **Learning by observation:** Participants can learn a great deal by observing the behaviors and interactions of others. "Watching how experienced professionals handle discussions and negotiations provides invaluable learning opportunities," remarked a destination representative.

3.2.6 Local economic and social impact
In-person meetings have significant local economic and social impacts that extend beyond the immediate event. These impacts include boosting local businesses, creating jobs, and fostering community engagement.

- **Economic boost:** "Meetings bring in revenue for local hotels, restaurants, and other businesses," highlighted a participant. This economic boost can be substantial, particularly for smaller communities.

- **Community engagement**: In-person meetings can foster a sense of community and bring people together in ways that virtual meetings cannot. "Engaging with the local community and incorporating local culture into the event can create a more enriching experience for all involved," suggested an industry leader.

3.3. Roles & responsibilities for inclusive meetings
Inclusivity emerged as a cornerstone of the discussions at the IMEX Policy Forum. Participants emphasized that truly effective meetings must be accessible and inclusive, accommodating diverse needs and perspectives. This section explores the various roles and responsibilities required to achieve inclusive meetings, drawing on direct quotes from the forum's wide array of attendees.

3.3.1 Accessibility in various dimensions
Ensuring accessibility from multiple dimensions—information, financial, travel, and meeting spaces—is fundamental to creating inclusive meetings.

- **Financial accessibility:** A participant stressed, "Providing bursaries to bring less privileged or marginalized communities to participate is essential." Financial barriers often prevent diverse voices from being heard, and addressing this issue is crucial for inclusivity.

- **Travel accessibility:** Another attendee highlighted the importance of travel accessibility, stating, "We must consider the travel needs of all participants, ensuring that venues are easily reachable and accommodating."

- **Flexible meeting spaces:** An industry leader pointed out, "Our meeting spaces must be adaptable to accommodate different needs, from wheelchair accessibility to quiet zones for neurodiverse attendees."

3.3.2. Engaging local industries and ecosystems

Leveraging local industries, thinkers, and ecosystems can enrich meetings and make them more inclusive.

- **Local engagement:** A representative shared, "Working on bringing your local industries and thinkers to the meetings can provide diverse perspectives and enhance the overall experience."

- **Regional expertise**: Another participant noted, "Engaging with local experts can bridge the gap between global knowledge and local application, making the content more relevant and impactful."

3.3.3. Bringing marginalized communities to participate

Deliberate efforts must be made to include marginalized communities in meetings, ensuring their voices are heard and valued.

- **Inclusive participation:** A participant emphasized, "We need to be deliberate in making it happen, ensuring that marginalized communities are not just invited but actively engaged."

- **Broadening stakeholder groups:** An attendee added, "Identifying broader stakeholder groups and educating them about the importance of their participation can lead to more diverse outcomes."

3.3.4. Deliberate inclusivity in event design

Inclusive meetings require intentional design that prioritizes engagement and participation from all attendees.

- **Event design**: A participant mentioned, "Better event design that engineers serendipity, interaction, and new connections is crucial for inclusivity."

- Pre-Event Preparation: Another attendee emphasized, "Get delegates to prepare before coming to the event. Clear communication of what the outcome should be can make the meeting more inclusive and effective."

3.3.5. Decision-makers and stakeholders' involvement

Decision-makers and stakeholders play a pivotal role in fostering inclusivity and ensuring that meetings are accessible to all.

- **Stakeholder engagement:** An industry leader noted, "Having decision-makers and stakeholders involved in the planning process can ensure that diverse perspectives are considered."

- **Outcome-oriented design**: Another participant added, "Designing meetings with clear outcomes and involving stakeholders in this process can lead to more inclusive and effective meetings."

3.4. What needs to change for meetings to be 'good' or 'much better'

The discussions underscored that while many meetings are effective, there is significant room for improvement to elevate them from merely "good" to "much better." Participants identified several key areas that require change, focusing on the integration of technology, enhanced event design, pre-event preparation, clear communication, and sustainability. This section delves into these insights, drawing on direct quotes from the forum attendees to provide a nuanced understanding of the necessary changes.

3.4.1. Better use of technology
Leveraging technology effectively can significantly enhance the quality of meetings, making them more engaging and impactful.

- **Tech integration:** A participant pointed out, "We need to use technology to make meetings better, leaning into the social impact of events." This includes using tech tools for better engagement, interaction, and accessibility.

- **Virtual and hybrid models**: Another attendee highlighted the importance of hybrid models, stating, "Incorporating virtual elements can extend the reach of the meeting and make it more inclusive."

3.4.2. Improved event design and pre-event preparation
Thoughtful event design and thorough pre-event preparation are crucial for enhancing the overall effectiveness of meetings.

- **Event design:** A representative emphasized, "Meetings need to be designed with a clear outcome in mind. Be open to doing things differently to enhance interaction and engagement."

- **Pre-event preparation**: Another participant noted, "Get delegates to prepare before coming to the event. Clear communication of the expected outcomes can make the meeting more focused and productive."

3.4.3. More interaction and engagement
Increasing the level of interaction and engagement among participants can transform the meeting experience, making it more dynamic and effective.

- **Interactive formats:** A participant remarked, "Investing in interactive tools and formats can make meetings more valuable. This includes personalized experiences and matchmaking to improve networking."

- **Participant-centered approach**: An industry leader added, "We need to move from attendees to participants, ensuring that everyone is actively engaged and contributing."

3.4.4. Clear communication of objectives and outcomes
Clear and transparent communication of the meeting's objectives and expected outcomes is essential for aligning participants' efforts and expectations.

- **Defined objectives:** A participant stated, "We must tell attendees upfront what the principles of the meeting are and what we aim to achieve. This clarity helps in aligning everyone's efforts."

- **Outcome communication:** Another attendee emphasized, "Commit to communicating the post-meeting broader impact. This helps in understanding the value generated and the outcomes achieved."

3.4.5. Focus on sustainability and social impact

Incorporating sustainability and social impact into the core design of meetings can enhance their relevance and value.

- **Sustainable practices**: A participant noted, "Sustainable meetings should focus on reducing energy consumption, waste, and plastic. This not only benefits the environment but also enhances the meeting's reputation."

- **Social impact:** An attendee highlighted, "We need to go beyond economic impact and talk to the personal narrative through storytelling. This can help in engaging the community and creating a more meaningful impact."

3.5. Communicating the broader impact of meetings on society

The discussions at the imex policy forum underscored the importance of effectively communicating the broader impact of meetings on society. Meetings are not just about business transactions; they have far-reaching implications for local economies, communities, and social cohesion. Participants emphasized the need for storytelling, local media engagement, data-driven communication, and community involvement to convey these impacts compellingly. This section delves into these insights, enriched with direct quotes from forum attendees.

3.5.1. Storytelling and personal narratives

Storytelling is a powerful tool for conveying the impact of meetings. Personal narratives can humanize the data and make the benefits more relatable to a broader audience.

- **Engaging stories:** We need to go beyond economic impact and talk to the personal narrative through storytelling. As one participant noted, "This approach can engage the community and create a more meaningful connection."

- **Humanizing data:** Curating real stories and understanding the relevant narratives to communicate them effectively to stakeholders can make the impact more tangible. "Curate the real stories and understand the relevant stories to communicate them effectively to stakeholders," emphasized another attendee.

3.5.2. Local media engagement

Engaging local media is crucial for amplifying the impact of meetings and reaching a wider audience.

- **Media involvement:** Involving the media before the event and making it about the community when applicable can build a narrative that resonates with the local population. "This helps in building a narrative that resonates with the local population," suggested a representative.

- **Positive coverage:** Informing local media about the positive impacts of meetings, such as job creation, infrastructure development, and economic benefits, ensures broader visibility. "Local media should be informed about the positive impacts of meetings," added an industry leader.

3.5.3. Data and metrics to support impact
Data and metrics are essential for substantiating the impact of meetings. Quantitative evidence can complement storytelling and provide a robust foundation for communication efforts.

- **Data-driven communication:** Committing to communicate the post-meeting broader impact using data and metrics helps in demonstrating the tangible benefits of the meeting. "This helps in demonstrating the tangible benefits of the meeting," remarked a participant.

- **Baseline metrics:** Establishing consistent data and measures, and agreeing on language and definitions, can make communication more effective. "We need consistent data and measures to speak with one voice," emphasized another attendee.

3.5.4. Involvement of local communities and stakeholders
Involving local communities and stakeholders in the communication process can enhance the credibility and relevance of the message.

- **Community ambassadors:** Creating ambassadors from the locals can help in spreading the message more effectively. "Engaging the community ensures that the impact is felt more broadly," highlighted a participant.

- **Stakeholder collaboration:** Organizing collaboration with the city upfront and integrating it into the program ensures that the meeting aligns with local objectives and enhances its impact. "This ensures that the meeting aligns with local objectives and enhances its impact," noted another attendee.

3.5.5. Clear, segmented communication strategies
Clear and segmented communication strategies are essential for targeting different audiences effectively. Tailoring the message to specific stakeholder groups can increase its impact.

- **Segmented messaging:** Segmenting and filtering the message to the right community, whether residents, policymakers, or the general public, is crucial for effective communication. "Segmenting and filtering the message to the right community is crucial for effective communication," stated a participant.

- **Tailored approaches:** Developing a high-level pitch for the general public and more detailed narratives for specific stakeholders ensures that the message resonates with each audience. "This ensures that the message resonates with each audience," emphasized another attendee.

4. Strategic recommendations

4.1. Enhance meeting content and quality

- **Invest in high-quality speakers and content:** Prioritize the selection of well-prepared, engaging speakers who can deliver impactful presentations. Ensure that the content is relevant, current, and addresses key issues.

- **Foster meaningful discussions:** Design meeting formats that encourage deep, impactful discussions. Utilize workshops, roundtables, and interactive sessions to stimulate innovative thinking and solutions.

4.2. Promote knowledge transfer and capacity building

- **Leverage global expertise:** Facilitate the transfer of knowledge from global experts to local stakeholders. Organize sessions that bridge global knowledge with local applications, enriching the local knowledge base.

- **Build regional capacity:** Focus on long-term capacity building by equipping local professionals with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive. Implement training programs and workshops that leave a lasting impact.

4.3. Ensure inclusivity and accessibility

- **Address financial barriers:** Provide bursaries and subsidies to enable participation from less privileged and marginalized communities. Ensure that financial constraints do not hinder diverse voices from being heard.

- **Design inclusive spaces:** Create flexible meeting spaces that accommodate diverse needs, including accessibility for individuals with disabilities. Ensure that all participants can engage fully and comfortably.

- **Engage local ecosystems:** Involve local industries, thinkers, and ecosystems in the meetings. This enriches the content and ensures that the meeting is relevant and impactful for the local context.

4.4. Leverage technology for enhanced engagement

- **Integrate advanced technologies:** Utilize technology to enhance engagement, interaction, and accessibility. Implement virtual and hybrid models to extend the reach of the meeting and make it more inclusive.

- **Use data analytics:** Employ data analytics to understand participant behavior and preferences. Use these insights to tailor the meeting experience and improve overall effectiveness.

4.5. Focus on sustainability and social impact

- **Implement sustainable practices:** Design meetings that minimize environmental impact by reducing energy consumption, waste, and plastic use. Promote sustainability as a core principle of meeting design.

- **Highlight social impact:** Communicate the broader social impacts of meetings through storytelling and personal narratives. Engage local communities and ensure that the meeting contributes positively to the local context.

4.5.6. Communicate objectives and outcomes clearly

- **Define clear objectives**: Articulate clear objectives and desired outcomes for each meeting. Ensure that all participants understand the purpose and goals of the meeting.

- **Report on outcomes:** Commit to communicating the post-meeting broader impact using data and metrics. Provide detailed reports and summaries that highlight the tangible benefits and outcomes achieved.

4.5.7 Engage and empower local communities

- **Create community ambassadors:** Involve local community members as ambassadors to spread the message and enhance the meeting's impact. Engage with local media to amplify the positive effects of the meeting.

- **Collaborate with local stakeholders:** Organize collaboration with the city and local stakeholders upfront. Integrate local objectives into the meeting program to ensure alignment and enhance overall impact.

The IMEX Policy Forum is organised in collaboration with City Destinations Alliance (CityDNA), the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), the International Association of Convention Centres (AIPC), Meetings Mean Business Coalition, Destinations International and German Convention Bureau (GCB) under the auspices of the Joint Meetings Industry Council (JMIC) and Events Industry Council (EIC).

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Thank you for being part of the IMEX Policy Forum and please save the date for the 2025 edition, **Tuesday 20 May, 2025**