



Program

IMEX-MPI-MCI Future Leaders Forum
IMEX Frankfurt 2026



Wednesday, May 20, 2026
Dialog, 9.2 - Messe Frankfurt

Moderated by Rui Cruz Alves, Senior Producer, Live Production, Emota

10-11:15am

International University Challenge finals (*attendance optional*)

Panel of judges:

Joost de Meyer, Chairman & CEO, First Incentive Travel

Rachel Benedick, Chief Revenue Officer, Meeting Professionals International (MPI)

Avinash Chandarana, Global Learning and Development Director, MCI Group

Be inspired by the creative event proposals from your fellow Future Leaders.

The International University Challenge took place at three Future Leaders Forums around the world during 2025 and 2026. The finals bring the regional winners together to compete for the grand prize: a sponsored trip to either MPI's World Education Congress or the MPI European Meetings and Events Conference, plus international publicity from the IMEX and MPI PR teams.

11:30-11:45am

Arrival and registration

11:45am-12:15pm

Welcome to the IMEX-MPI-MCI Future Leaders Forum and icebreaker

Ray Bloom, Chairman, IMEX Group

Rachel Benedick, Chief Revenue Officer, MPI

Avinash Chandarana, Global Learning and Development Director, MCI Group

Rui Cruz Alves, Senior Producer, Live Production, Emota

Hannah Lee, Operations Manager, IMEX Group

Meet the organizers behind the Forum as they help you prepare for the day ahead and make the most of your experience. Connect with your fellow Future Leaders and start building new relationships.

12:15-1pm

Communicating with confidence in your first professional roles

David Setka, Speaker and Coach

Starting a career calls for more than skills and knowledge—it also depends on how you communicate. Learn how small shifts in language, posture and clarity can shape how seriously you're taken. Gain practical communication tools for your internships, first roles and team interactions.

1-1:15pm

Meet and mingle bingo: Get to know your fellow Future Leaders

Rui Cruz Alves, Senior Producer, Live Production, Emota

Connections are everything in the events industry. Before lunch, enjoy a fun, fast and pressure-free way to get to know the people who may one day be your colleagues, collaborators or partners.

Move around the room to uncover fun facts, shared experiences and hidden talents.

1:15-2pm

Lunch break – Dialog, 9.2

Join your fellow Future Leaders for lunch provided by IMEX or explore the show floor.

2-2:45pm

Fast Forward 15 mentee panel

Your voice matters: Finding it, owning it and building your personal brand

Moderated by: Sammy Connell, Principal Official (Conferences and Events), NASUWT

Panelists:

Hannah Jess, Sales & Event Executive, Rory's Travel Club

Irene Haastrup, Freelance Event Manager

Jessica Robinson, Founder and Director, JJR Events

Olivia Dobberson, Project Manager, Cheerful Twentyfirst

Louise Balderson, Project Manager, XSEM

Finding your voice and building your personal brand are essential skills for emerging leaders— but they don't always come naturally. This panel explores authentic ways to grow your confidence, increase your visibility and communicate your value. Through practical insight and real-world experience, the panel shares tools to help you strengthen your presence and take ownership of your professional narrative.

2:45-3pm

Coffee break

3-4:30pm

Roundtable session: Meet the experts

Receive first-hand industry insight, hear personal stories, explore potential career pathways and connect with leading professionals. Bring your questions and join small-group discussions with experts of your choice.

After a short introduction, you'll take part in four 20-minute discussion rounds, each with a different experts.

The experts:

Christina Strohschneider, Head of Vienna Office, bnetwork

Diana Frederiksen, Head of Business Development, Conferences & Events, Excel London

Thomas Mauch, International Senior Sales Manager, Congress and Large Event Sales, Bella Center

Hannah Elston, Senior Manager of Partnerships, Marketing and Communications, Event Leaders Exchange (ELX)

Sammy Connell, Principal Official (Conferences and Events), NASUWT

Hannah Jess, Sales & Event Executive, Rory's Travel Club

Jessica Robinson, Founder and Director, JJR Events

Neil Thompson, Founder and Managing Director, The Delegate Wranglers

Ruud Janssen, Founder & Managing Partner, Event Design Collective

Candice Beckman, Senior Manager- Industry Engagement & Customer Events, Encore

4:30pm

Closing remarks

Thursday, May 21, 2026

Inspiration Hub – Hall 9

9:30-10am

If you're at the show on Thursday, you're invited to start the day with continued networking with your fellow Future Leaders on the Encore booth (Inspiration Hub, Hall 9, 9004).

10am-12:30pm

Following this, we highly recommend our Rising Talent program, created for people who are new to the world of meetings and events.

You're also welcome to join any of the education sessions on the Inspiration Hub – full program coming soon.