



Global Advocacy Forum Highlights

A publication from
The Global Advocacy Alliance

ICCA Community Shares Best Practices

Introduction and Objectives

This year's IMEX brought the meetings and events industry together once again to exchange ideas, build relationships, and contribute to our shared goals. One of the topics that motivates our community is advocacy — a word that conveys a powerful message. This document is a starting point highlighting the ways in which the ICCA community is thinking about advocacy and how they can begin to formulate programs and platforms on which to advance individualised advocacy strategies.



Senthil Gopinath
CEO, ICCA

We'd like to acknowledge Davies Tanner, ICCA's Global Communication Partner; Gevme, our AI partner; and all members and collaborators for their important work in helping to gather and present these guidelines. Using the ideas shared here, all members of our community can begin building the framework necessary to advance their advocacy goals.

Objectives

The "Advocating for the Business Event Sector — Rapid Fire" workshop at IMEX Frankfurt 2024 brought together over 200 delegates from across the globe to develop an initial draft of a Global Advocacy Pathway. The workshop showed a clear need for industry unity, data-driven advocacy, and strategic innovation to strengthen the business event sector's position.

The workshop was organised by the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) and The Business of Events by Davies Tanner, an independent think tank and policy unit based in the United Kingdom. The Global Advocacy Pathway is designed to:

- **Highlight the economic impact of meetings and events**
- **Emphasise social impact**
- **Underscore cultural importance**
- **Encourage corporate engagement**
- **Facilitate government engagement**
- **Promote soft-power initiatives**
- **Provide advocacy education and tools**

Global Business Events Industry Landscape

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The global business events industry is a dynamic and diverse space, encompassing a wide range of event types and formats, including conferences, conventions, exhibitions, trade shows, incentive travel, and corporate meetings.

The industry's value extends far beyond direct spending. Business events catalyse long-term economic development by attracting investment, talent, and business to host destinations. They also generate significant social and cultural benefits, enhancing quality of life, community engagement, and global understanding.

Regional Approaches to Advocacy Education

Effective advocacy requires understanding each group's needs, priorities, and challenges and fostering collaboration among them. Organisations should be able to adapt their advocacy messaging to resonate with folks in each region.

Action Items:

- **Create regional advocacy Pathway outlining strategies, messaging, and best practices**
- **Find case studies of effective advocacy in different regions to serve as models**
- **Foster knowledge sharing between regions to spread innovative advocacy approaches**
- **Develop a framework for tailoring global industry messages to regional priorities**
- **Create a guide with relevant facts, statistics, and arguments to support regional advocacy**



Economic Impact of Business Events

2

Business events are a big driver of economic activity and job creation all around the world. The community contributes hundreds of billions of dollars to national economies and supports millions of jobs. Quantifying and conveying the importance of this big economic impact is important when you're trying to secure government and corporate support.

Direct Spending and Job Creation

Spending on business events flows to a wide range of suppliers and vendors, including hotels, convention centres, caterers, audiovisual providers, transportation companies, and more. Capturing and reporting this full scope of impact is an important part of advocacy.

To make the case for the economic importance of business events, the industry needs clear data. Establishing common data collection and reporting frameworks at the national — and even global — level would create a better story.

Action Items:

- **Develop consistent ways to measure and report spending and job creation**
- **Gather data from industry players to quantify impact at city, regional, and national levels**
- **Report economic impact to policymakers and other relevant individuals and groups**
- **Get on the same page when it comes to data collection and reporting standards**
- **Provide data reporting tools and templates to relevant people**



"WE NEED TO BE VERY CLEAR WHAT THE IMPACT IS. WE KNOW THERE ARE WIDER BENEFITS, AND THOSE ARE ALSO VERY IMPORTANT, BUT IF WE'RE NOT CLEAR WHAT WE'RE DELIVERING, THEN THE FUNDING, YEAR-ON-YEAR, WILL GET CHIPPED AWAY."

— PATRICK LAMONT, VISIT SCOTLAND

Working together to collect, analyse, and communicate the economic impact of business events, the industry can do a better job of advocating for the support and policies needed to boost growth.

Quantifying the meetings and events industry's role as an important part of the economy and a job creator is a big part of positioning business events as a crucial part of the global economy.

Social Impact of Business Events

3

Business events serve as catalysts for positive social change and cultural exchange that goes beyond the convention centre. While the economic benefits are often the focus, it's also important to highlight the big social impact these events have on both local and global communities.

Driving Prosperity and Positive Change

Business events are drivers of both short-term and long-term prosperity for host destinations. As Bradley Sutherland, vice chair of Meetings Mean Business Canada, said, "We also aim to educate all Canadians of the importance of business events for both short-term and long-term prosperity."

By attracting business travellers, events boost the local economy through hotel stays, dining, transportation, and more. But more importantly, they spark innovation, knowledge sharing, and collaboration that help long-term economic growth. The exposure and connections made at business events can attract new businesses, talent, and investment to a destination for years to come.

"WE CAN POINT TO HOTEL OCCUPANCY AND ECONOMIC FIGURES, BUT THE TRUE IMPACT OF EVENTS IS THAT THEY ARE CATALYSTS FOR CULTURAL EXCHANGE. IT IS INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT AND IS SOMETHING THAT SHOULD RESONATE WITH GOVERNMENTS ALL AROUND THE WORLD."

— MARTIN FULLARD, THE BUSINESS OF EVENTS



Action Items:

- **Quantify and communicate short-term and long-term economic benefits of business events to the public**
- **Gather case studies and examples showing how business events have sparked long-term prosperity for host destinations**
- **Highlight examples of social/societal issues tackled and progress made via business events**

Business events bring people from different countries and cultures together, giving them a chance to connect, share perspectives, and find common ground. They break down barriers and stereotypes while building bridges.

By shining a brighter light on the social impact of business events, the industry can shift government perceptions and gain support. By using proof points, case studies and a unified voice, business events advocates can show policymakers how these events enrich communities and society.

Cultural Importance of Business Events

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Business events play a big role in positively affecting host destinations. By bringing together people from different countries and backgrounds, they serve as catalysts for cultural understanding, collaboration, and unity.

Bringing People Together

Business events can also serve as powerful catalysts for economic development when strategically designed to support growth in specific industries. By purposefully designing business events to advance corporate sustainability goals and economic growth, destinations can build engagement with industry leaders and position themselves as partners in tackling global challenges and spurring innovation.

Action Items:

- Find unique aspects of regions that can appeal to a wide range of people
- Work with local stakeholders to develop marketing initiatives that promote the parts of the region that make it special; a “regional brand”
- Foster collaboration between destinations to host and support business events



BUSINESS EVENTS CAN BE A UNIFYING FORCE, AND CERTAINLY AT REGIONAL LEVEL IN THE MIDDLE EAST, IT HAS BROUGHT US TOGETHER TO APPRECIATE THAT."

—SUMAIRA ISAACS, DEPUTY CHAIR OF THE ICCA MIDDLE EAST CHAPTER

Beyond economic benefits, business events create long-lasting positive impacts on host destinations, including the development of intellectual capital.

Action Items

- Gather and share compelling case studies showing the long-term positive impacts and legacy value of business events
- Consistently use agreed-upon industry terminology in all communications
- Actively educate relevant participants, including government officials and the media, about the positive impact and lasting benefits business events can have on a place

By emphasising the special impact business events can have on a community, as well as their ability to unite regions, encourage understanding, and bring people together, the industry can get greater recognition and support from governments, individuals, organisations, and local communities.

Key Strategies for Corporate Engagement

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Business events offer useful opportunities to engage corporations and industry leaders in discussions that drive innovation, investment, and growth. By lining up event themes and content with corporate priorities, destinations and event organisers can attract decision-makers and help build impactful partnerships.

Leveraging Events to Boost Sustainability Goals

By being strategic about aligning event themes with corporate sustainability agendas, destinations can attract the right contributors and inspire meaningful conversations that drive progress.

Action Items:

- Find corporate sustainability priorities and target events that align with those themes
- Develop compelling content and speaker lineups that draw sustainability leaders
- Create forums and spaces for corporations to showcase sustainability initiatives and collaborate on solutions



IF YOU HAVE AN AUDIENCE OF ALL THE BIG ENERGY COMPANIES IN THE ROOM TO TALK ABOUT CLEAN TECH, THAT'S A FANTASTIC WAY TO ENGAGE A LOT OF THOSE FOLKS IN THAT CONVERSATION,"

— PETER COTTAN, DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS EVENTS AT EXPLORE EDMONTON

Business events can also serve as powerful catalysts for economic development when strategically designed to support growth in specific industries.

Action Items

- Conduct economic impact studies to find out the number of jobs and how much investment was generated by business events
- Team up with economic development agencies to identify and attract events that line up with growth strategies
- Make connections with event delegates and local companies, entrepreneurs, and investors

By purposefully designing business events to advance corporate sustainability goals and economic growth, destinations can build deeper engagement with industry leaders and position themselves as strategic partners in tackling global challenges and spurring innovation.

Government Advocacy Guidance

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Effective government advocacy is crucial for securing support, funding, and favourable policies for the business events industry. By strategically engaging with government representatives at all levels, communicating the value and impact of business events, and presenting a unified voice, the industry can build strong partnerships with governments and drive sustainable growth.

Educating and Engaging Stakeholders

Advocating for the business events industry requires communicating with policymakers at all levels — federal, provincial/state, and local — about the significant social and economic benefits the community brings. Beyond just tourism portfolios, it is important to engage with other relevant government departments and decision-makers.



Action Items

- **Develop targeted education and communication materials for different levels of government**
- **Name and engage with relevant government portfolios and decision-makers outside of the tourism space**
- **Establish consistent data collection and reporting frameworks to quantify the economic, social, and cultural impact of business events**
- **Develop compelling case studies and ROI analysis to show the value of government investments in the business events space**

Demonstrate ROI and Speak With a Unified Voice

To secure government funding and support, the business events industry must present clear, consistent data that shows the tangible impact and return on investment (ROI) of the sector. Working together across regions and appreciating the shared value and strengths of business events can also create a compelling advocacy message. It's key to develop shared advocacy messages and strategies that highlight the regional and global impact of business events.

Soft-Power Initiatives

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Business events play a crucial role in advancing a country or region's soft power agenda. By highlighting these events, destinations can boost their global reputation, increase international cooperation, and drive economic growth. This section explores relevant soft-power initiatives that can be implemented through business events.

Make Doing Business Easy & Raise Meetings Profile

One way to attract international business events is by creating a business-friendly environment. Raising the profile of the meetings industry is crucial for garnering support and investment from policymakers.

Action Items

- **Collaborate with relevant government agencies to streamline visa processes for business event attendees**
- **Develop a comprehensive guide outlining the steps for organising business events in the destination**
- **Conduct research to quantify the economic and social impact of business events**
- **Engage in targeted advocacy campaigns to educate policymakers about the value of the meetings industry**



"WE WANT TO MAKE SURE THAT OUR COUNTRY IS REALLY EASY TO WORK WITH, THAT VISAS ARE PROCESSED QUICKLY."

— BRADLEY SUTHERLAND, VICE CHAIR OF MEETINGS MEAN BUSINESS CANADA

Unifying Regions and Spurring Job Creation

Business events have the power to bring regions together and highlight their collective strengths. By encouraging regional collaboration, business events can contribute to building stronger ties and promoting shared interests. By aligning business events with specific industries, destinations can drive innovation, investment, and employment. Putting these soft-power initiatives into practice, destinations can use the potential of business events to boost their global influence, encourage regional cooperation, and help build economic growth.

Measurement and Reporting

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Accurately measuring and consistently reporting the economic, social, and environmental impact of the business events industry is important for advocacy with government and others. Consolidated industry data presented in a clear and compelling way can protect and grow support from the public.

Importance of Data Impact and Consistency

One way to attract international business events is by creating a business-friendly environment. Raising the profile of the meetings industry is crucial for garnering support and investment from policymakers. Robin Mack from Tourism Australia highlighted the need for the industry to collect and report data in a consistent way, both within countries and around the world. "It is important to address the need for commonality and consistency in the data we collect, and also how we talk about it both nationally and on the global stage," he said.

Action Items

- **Figure out relevant economic, social, and environmental impact metrics**
- **Gather data from relevant industry representatives**
- **Develop clear and compelling impact reports for government and others**
- **Align as an industry on consistent data collection and reporting standards**
- **Provide data to industry associations for reporting**
- **Advocate for global data consistency through international industry bodies**



"DATA IS VERY IMPORTANT. UNDERSTANDING YOUR ECONOMIC IMPACT, BUT ALSO YOUR SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT INCREASINGLY IS IMPORTANT."

— PHILLIPA HARRISON, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF TOURISM AUSTRALIA

Acknowledgements

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ABOUT SNAPSIGHT

SnapSight is an AI-powered insights platform that transforms your organisation's content into actionable insights. We analyse event sessions, surveys, industry reports, internal documents, and more, empowering your organisation to make data-driven decisions that drive growth and innovation.

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About The Business of Events by Davies Tanner

The Business of Events by Davies Tanner is an independent think tank and advocacy network for the global events community. Its primary role is to raise the importance and profile of business events as economic, policy, and community drivers and to maximise the opportunities achieved by having a strong business-events economy.

This is achieved through a combination of policy, advocacy, content, and engagement, bringing together senior leaders from across the business events industry to discuss policy ideas and initiatives and to connect with governments, policymakers and influencers, public organisations, and politicians.

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