

{EXPERT ADVICE}

The Meetings Report

Michigan's first association meetings industry survey.

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IN 2011 MY CONSULTING COMPANY, Event Garde, partnered with the Michigan Society of Association Executives to develop and release a comprehensive, 65-question survey geared toward Michigan associations. We recognized the lack of Michigan-specific data and statistics and the need for benchmarking data depicting the meetings industry's best practices.

The resulting 16-page report, *The Meetings Report*, comprises seven sections, drawing on data analyzed through a variety of methods. The report's seven sections are:

- 1) Organization demographics:** association profile, annual budget, meeting revenue, fiscal-year comparisons, paid staff and interns.
- 2) Function leader:** title, salary, education, gender, age and ethnicity.
- 3) 2011 meetings calendar:** meeting types, exhibits, cancellations, certification programs, educational experiences and outsourcing.
- 4) Professional speakers:** hiring, number, compensation, speaker bureaus, new speakers, decision-making, contracting, optimization and sponsors.
- 5) 2011 major meeting:** keynote and plenary sessions, concurrent sessions, professional

speakers, industry speakers, call for presentations, staffing, paid registrations, member participation, percentage of annual income, room pickup, exhibits, duration, contracts and site selection.

- 6) Industry speakers:** compensation, preparation and orientation.
- 7) Evaluations:** utilization, evaluation types, collection methods, learning, session submissions and live video streaming.

The Meetings Report delivers five key recommendations for redefining association education strategy. The recommendations are not only instructive and actionable, but remarkably universal. In fact, when applied to any organization's annual education strategy, these simple but effective tactics can substantively redefine how success is measured.

The five key recommendations that emerged from this study are:

- 1) Diversify revenue.** This applies both to the percentage of annual revenue attributed to conventions, exhibits and meetings, as well as the type and number of meetings your organization plans each year.
- 2) Reward difference.** The way we interpret and negotiate the world is informed by our unique identity, culture and experience. Greater diversity means greater variation, creativity and innovation in shaping quality edu-

cation offerings.

3) Value context. It's vitally important to meet the needs of both your members and your industry. Therefore, all the research in the world is meaningless if not applied within the unique context of your organization.

4) Maximize opportunities. Associations must employ the meetings industry's best practices if they expect to stay relevant, competitive and sustainable. This means embracing change and encouraging a healthy amount of experimentation.

5) Prioritize learning. When resources are diverted from professional development to meetings management, learning can be compromised. To ensure your programs' integrity, learning must take precedence over logistics.



Aaron D. Wolowiec is founder and president of Event Garde, a Grand Rapids-based professional development consulting firm. Event Garde works with association leaders who want to deliver dynamic, meaningful and compelling education and networking experiences.

A copy of the report may be ordered via msae.com. It's free for contributors, \$59 for MSAE members and \$99 for nonmembers.