

# THE MEETINGS REPORT

By Aaron D. Wolowiec, MSA, CAE, CMP, CTA

As an MSAE member, you have access to Michigan's first association meetings industry survey and its key recommendations.

Shortly after launching my consulting practice in 2011, I realized that both my clients and I could benefit from benchmarking data on meetings industry best practices. However, the data and statistics that currently exist are largely national in scope. For a variety of reasons, the Michigan experience is different than that of associations operating inside the Beltway.

As a result, my firm (Event Garde) promptly partnered with MSAE to develop and release a comprehensive survey geared toward Michigan associations. To the extent possible, respondent data were analyzed by a variety of different methods—and The Meetings Report was born. In addition to sharing the results of our inaugural survey and illuminating the state of the Michigan association meetings industry, this essential resource delivers five key recommendations redefining association education strategy.



## IT TAKES A VILLAGE

After reviewing respondent data, it was clear I needed assistance. Enter Alex Kontras. Kontras is a data manager for the City of Grand Rapids, where he employs ongoing formative evaluation methods to enhance the quality of community programs. Considering his prior work in the nonprofit community, Kontras was a natural fit to support this project and help author the report.

Cheryl Ronk, CAE, CMP served as an advisor and an advocate throughout the inception and implementation of this project. In addition to suggesting and editing questions for the survey instrument, Ronk also refined the report's narrative and key recommendations.

Finally, Kristen Parker graciously volunteered to edit the final draft of The Meetings Report. Parker is a media communications manager for Michigan State University, as well as a long-time friend and colleague. Her attention to detail is uncompromised, and she's acutely skilled at wielding a red pen.

## THE MEAT AND POTATOES

The resulting 16-page report comprises seven sections. Following is an overview of each:

### #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, 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 pick-up, 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.

Beyond the narrative, the report also contains 18 tables and three figures. For benchmarking purposes, associations

were often grouped into categories based on budget size. Categories include:

- **Small:** *Less than \$500,000*
- **Medium:** *\$500,000 to \$4.9 million*
- **Large:** *\$5 million and more*

## STRATEGIC PLANNING

As a result of this research, we uncovered countless insights that may be used by trade associations and professional societies statewide in future benchmarking and strategic planning efforts. And while the data are largely Michigan-specific, the five key recommendations precipitating from this 65-question survey and follow-on analysis are not only instructive and actionable, but also remarkably universal. In fact, when applied to any organization's annual education strategy, these simple tactics can substantively

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redefine how success is measured.

Likewise, the report is equally valuable to suppliers. Whether you represent a CVB, a hotel, a consulting firm or a product/service provider, you're bound to find the report (and its data, trends, tables and figures) incredibly helpful in understanding the association and meetings industries, as well as helping you better relate to clients and elevate your product/service offerings.

**KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Five key recommendations emerged from this study. Here is an overview:

**TACTIC #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.

**ASSOCIATIONS MUST EMPLOY MEETINGS INDUSTRY BEST PRACTICES IF THEY EXPECT TO STAY RELEVANT, COMPETITIVE, AND SUSTAINABLE. THIS MEANS EMBRACING CHANGE AND ENCOURAGING A HEALTHY AMOUNT OF EXPERIMENTATION.**

**TACTIC #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 education offerings.

**TACTIC #3: VALUE CONTEXT**

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

**TACTIC #4: MAXIMIZE OPPORTUNITIES**

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

**TACTIC #5: PRIORITIZE LEARNING**

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

**FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE**

The Meetings Report provides your organization the perfect opportunity to evaluate its current education strategies and to develop actionable next steps operationalizing the report's key recommendations. Focus on ways your association can elevate the quality and sophistication of its programs, build the reputation of its meetings department, and improve the association's bottom line. A copy of the report may be ordered via MSAE's website. It's free for contributors, \$59 for MSAE members and \$99 for non-members. ♦

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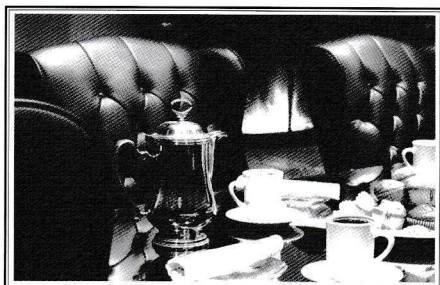
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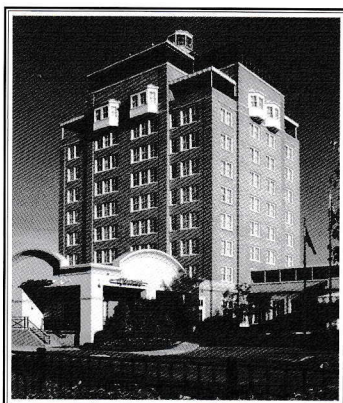
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