

Modernizing Client Events

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Key Topics



Event trends and data on participant preferences



Identifying the mismatch between what association conferences offer and what participants are looking for



Tactics for presenting new ideas and innovations to volunteer leaders or other association leaders who may not see the need for change



Strategies for modernizing event infrastructure across an AMC that don't break the bank

■ Raise your hand if...

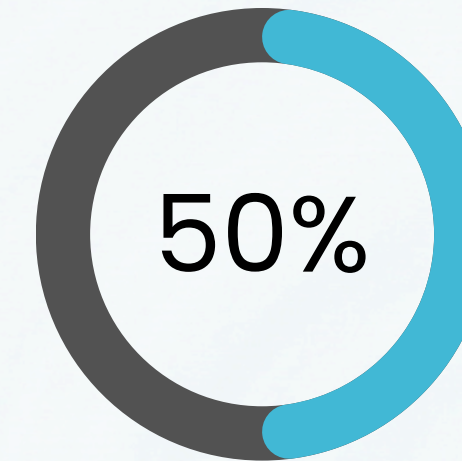


The Data

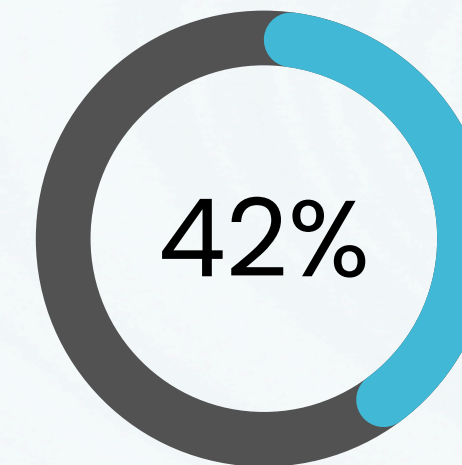
Challenges with attendance:

- up to 20% drop in sponsor/exhibitor attendance
- declines in international attendees
- increasing costs (across all aspects of meetings)
- political and social concerns
- value/ROI

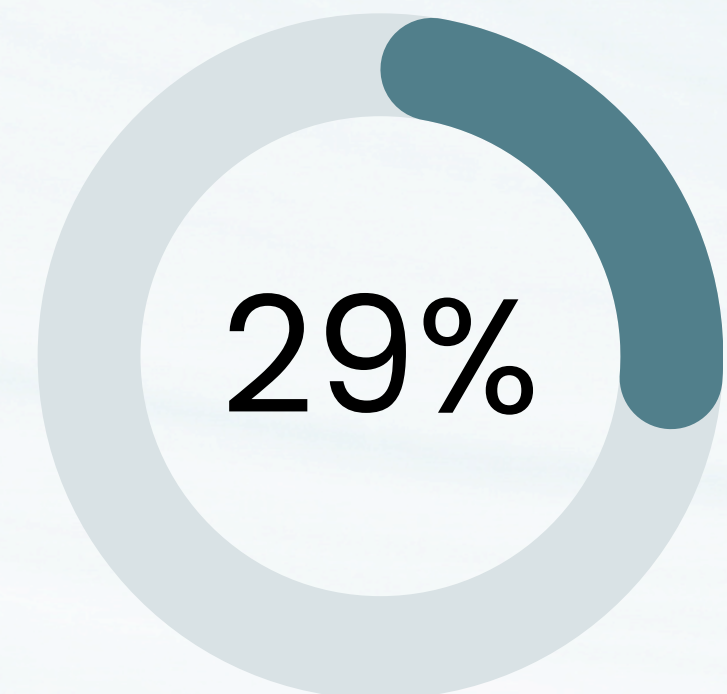
Despite headwinds, less than a third (29%) of respondents reported making changes to their meetings strategy



50% of associations reported meeting attendance decline in 2025



42% reported projected meeting attendance decline for 2026



What DO attendees want?



Local Connections

66% of attendees say they prefer swag or gifts with a local connection – an even stronger preference among Gen Z (70%) and Millennials (72%), compared to 59% of Gen X and 59% of Boomers



Purposeful Fun

56% overall say after-hours fun is a main reason for attending work events, but this jumps to 68% of Gen Z and 61% of Millennials, compared to just 47% of Gen X and 34% of Boomers -- early-career professionals see these networking and social experiences as fuel their drive to advance



Digital Tools to SUPPORT IRL

Two in three attendees (66%) agree that AI-powered networking helps them connect with like-minded professionals more easily, curating the right people to follow and meet on-site to power richer in person moments



Giving Back

(68%) would rather participate in a give-back activity that benefits the local community than receive a physical gift

Give me a break!



- Two-thirds (67%) say they feel less engaged during events if they don't get downtime
- 55% will skip event sessions to decompress if there are no planned breaks
- Boomers are far less likely to skip sessions to decompress (39%) compared to 61% of Gen Z and Millennials
- Boomers feel less guilty about stepping away, with only 48% reporting guilt, versus 68% of Gen Z and 62% of Millennials

Shared Values

Yes, there are some generational differences – but that's not the whole story.

Three Values That Matter Most to Event Attendees (regardless of demographics):

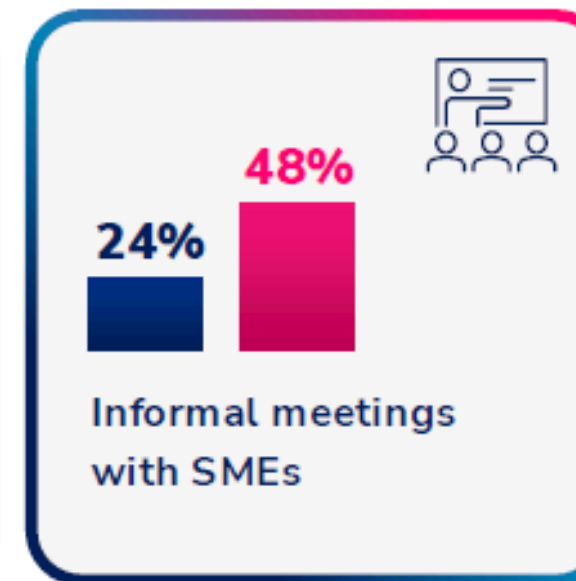
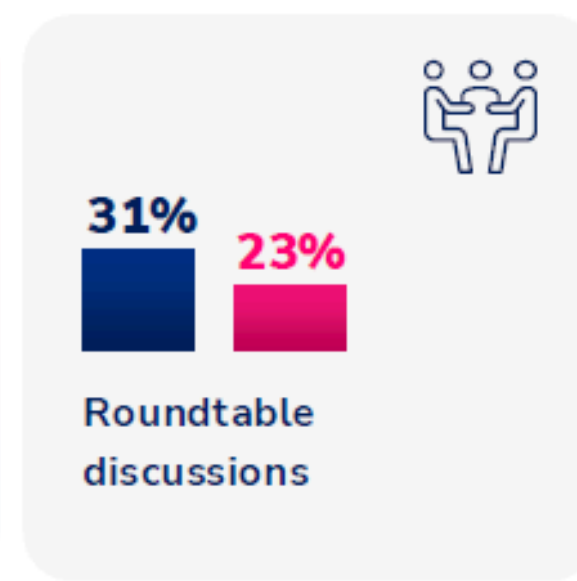
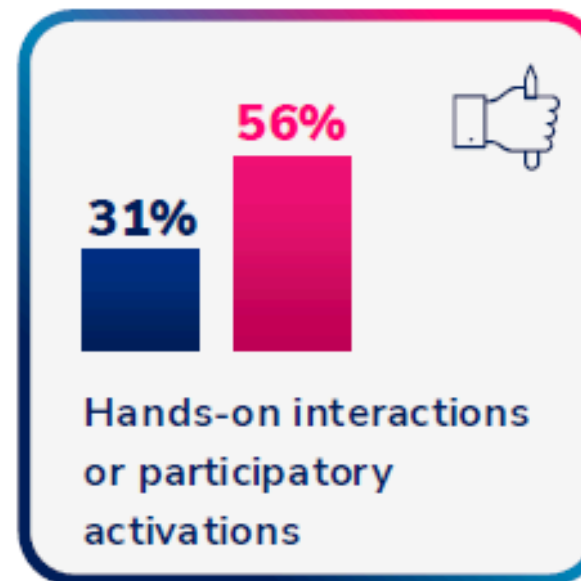
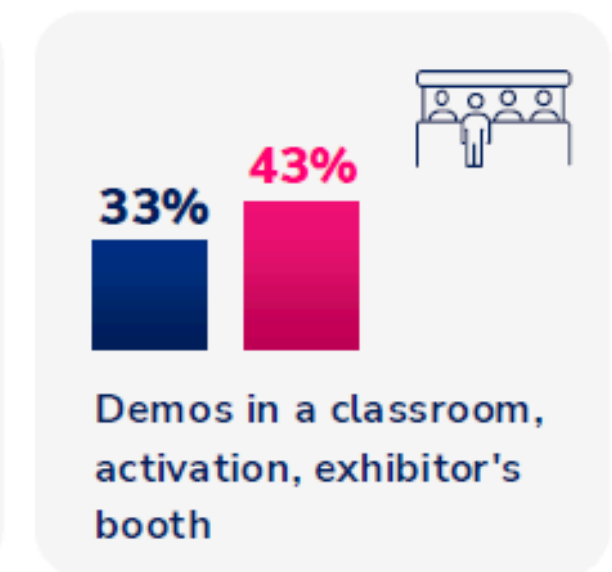
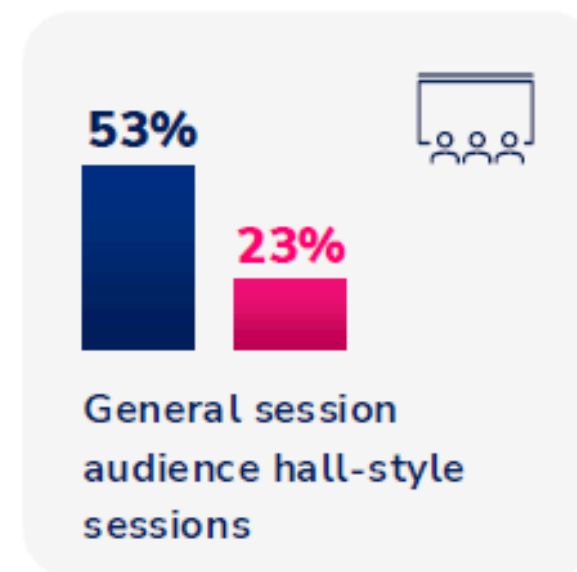
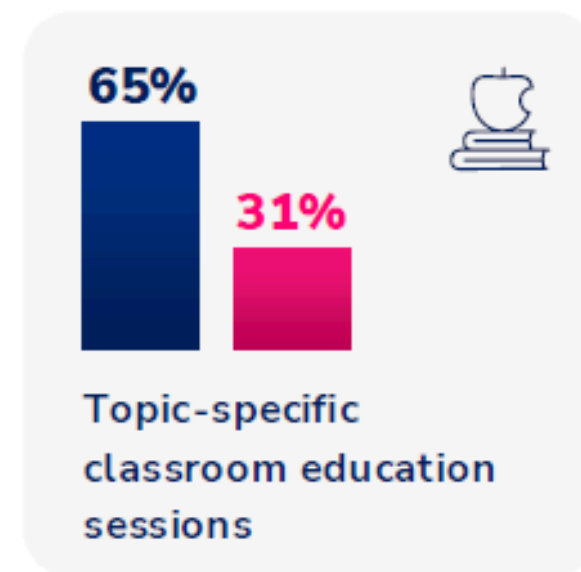
- Employment Security
- Personal Responsibility
- Community

Engagement increases by up to **40%** when your event reflects your audience's values. Trust goes up by **20%** when attendees feel seen and understood. And attendees are willing to pay up to **12%** more for experiences that align with what they care about most



The Gap

- Personalization and integrated technology
- Breaks and breathing room
- Connection & hands-on learning over lecture content
- Values



So...what do we do?

- Leverage AI for personalization
- Promote industry involvement/awareness for key decision-makers
- Enhance internal “marketing” opportunities
- Revamp your support and planning processes for your company



Leverage AI for Personalization



Strategies & Tactics:

- AI support for agenda building (before)
- AI analysis for audience needs (after)
- AI Agent to navigate and personalize schedule recommendations

Considerations:

- Privacy
- Cost
- Ethics

Promote industry involvement/awareness for key decision-makers



Strategies & Tactics:

- Invite a board member to an industry event
- Share articles/industry content
- Industry Trends presentation to start each year

Considerations:

- Relevance (what's in it for me)
- Budget & scale
- Revisit often

Enhance internal “marketing” opportunities



Strategies & Tactics:

- Regular updates to clients from different teams/departments
- Annual Reports
- “Bring a Friend” to Board Meetings

Considerations:

- Client proprietary information
- Revisit often
- Relevance, time, capacity

Revamp your support and planning processes for your company



Strategies & Tactics:

- Design-based model (AMR Example)
- Event Canvas across your company
- Start with a different question

Considerations:

- Good ideas $\neq$ good implementation
- All progress is progress!
- Measure, measure, measure

Make it Happen

- Turn to your partner and answer these questions:
 - what is one idea that you would like to implement when you get back?
 - by when?
 - how are you going to do it?
- Trade contact info
 - follow up in two weeks – how is it going?!



Resources



Hilton's 2026 Trends Report

What Each Generation Really Wants from B-to-B Events—And What the Data Says

What Meeting Planners Need to Know About Event Attendees in 2026

ASAE – The State of Associations report 2026

Freeman Trends Report Q4 2024

Thank You

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