

COVID-19 Recovery Dashboard

Survey and analysis by PCMA *Convene* editors

Charts and design by Point Five

Between February and March, a flurry of news articles predicted a huge surge in leisure travel — sometimes referred to as “revenge travel” — as people celebrate the end of the pandemic, make up for lost time, and splurge after the stress of living through COVID. Airlines have reported substantial jumps in air travel demand during March and the TSA has reported its highest number of passengers since March 2020, when the lockdowns began.

Even though health officials warn that the risk of COVID transmission remains a real concern, people are chomping at the bit to get out and see the world — or at least venture beyond their neighborhoods. We wondered: How much of that pent-up demand is spilling over to the events industry? So for this month’s COVID-19 Recovery Dashboard, we turned our attention to the prospect of in-person events to gauge whether or not our industry thinks we’re about to turn a corner.

There are some indications that events professionals are feeling more optimistic than last month. Of the nearly 500 respondents — 339 planners and 159 suppliers — who took the survey during the week of March 22, 57 percent of planners (versus 53 percent last month) and 52 percent of suppliers (versus 47 percent in February) said they are feeling hopeful. It’s a bit of a mixed bag, however. The same percentage of planners as last month — 30 percent — reported feeling anxious. The anxiety level among suppliers, on the other hand, went down nine points — from 29 percent last month to 20 percent in March.

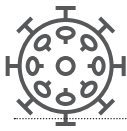
Suppliers also seem to be shifting their reskilling efforts to designing in-person experiences in a post-COVID world — 46 percent compared to 39 percent last month. There also were corresponding decreases in

their efforts when it came to rethinking new business models and business-continuity plans.

Get Ready for Q3

The majority of planners — 64 percent — said that they are planning in-person events in 2021. Of those, 17 percent is planning an event in what’s left of Q1 and in Q2; half is planning an event in Q3; and around one-third is working towards holding an event in the last quarter of 2021. Likewise, suppliers seem to have their eye on Q3 as a turning point, with 23 percent of respondents anticipating that the pent-up demand for travel in general will result in face-to-face attendance at regional and domestic events in Q3, compared to only 14 percent expecting that to happen in Q4.

And in the most sizable jump in the month-over-month results, 29 percent of suppliers — compared to 16 percent in February — said the most likely scenario for the recovery of the business events industry is/will be pent-up demand for all groups to meet face-to-face. Wrote one supplier: “The public health restrictions for our location were relaxed in March and we can now host larger gatherings for the first time since the start of the pandemic. March is the first month where some events on the books did not have to cancel. We are getting inquiries for space and events are starting to book!”



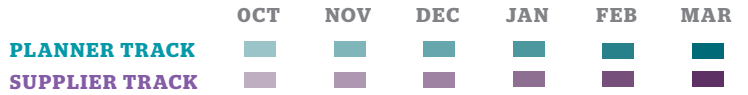
On this, planners were in agreement: 29 percent vs. 24 percent last month chose face-to-face as the most likely recovery scenario. Only 21 percent of suppliers, compared to 30 percent last month, foresee hybrid as the way forward, while a slightly higher percentage of planners this month (22 percent versus 18 percent last month) are focusing on hybrid solutions.

As for those hybrid solutions, there is no one-size-fits all approach. We asked planners to share how they see the mix of digital and in-person taking shape, providing four different scenarios. The largest percentage (35 percent) chose “other” and then explained their particular take on hybrid. Of the four options we spelled out, the most popular, chosen by 28 percent of planners, is a simultaneous, small in-person event with streaming video and a separate online program for a virtual audience — with the ability for both audiences to interact with each other.

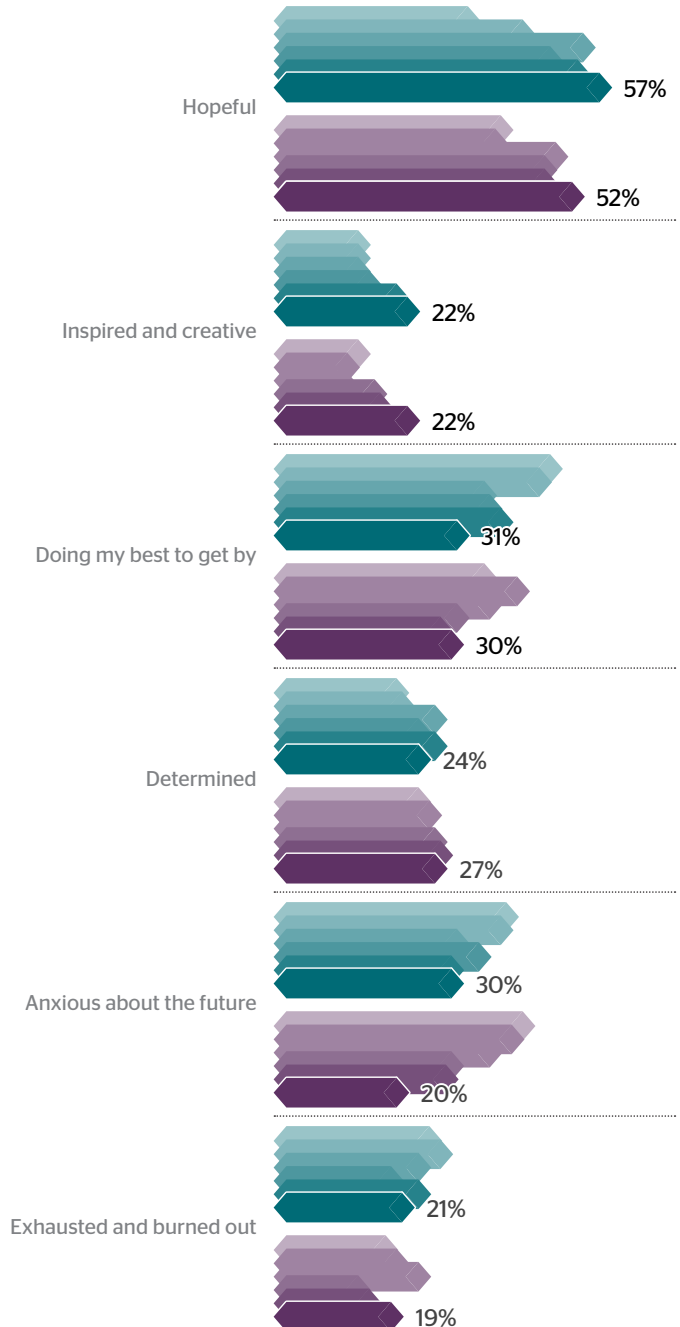
That hybrid events aren’t the industry’s silver bullet also is reflected in the fact that hybrid continues to be the most difficult financial event-planning challenge for organizers, cited by 41 percent of planner respondents versus 38 percent last month.

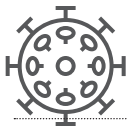
Despite expressing greater optimism, this month’s respondents acknowledged the economic and other realities that may hamper in-person attendance this year. The greatest percentage of both planners (36 percent) and suppliers (38 percent) said that while there may be pent-up demand to gather in person, until there is herd immunity, organizations will avoid assuming business travel risk — a bigger factor, their responses indicate, than economic COVID-19-related challenges to attendance.

As for when planners are making a go/no go decision about in-person events, their answers might help explain why their anxiety level remains high: One quarter is making the decision within two months of the event date and nearly the same percentage took to the open-ended comments page to share their angst. Said one: “We are in the process for planning for a live event and will make the decision to go or cancel based on the situation on the ground at the time and the best science available. If safe to do so, we go and suffer the consequences. If unsafe, we cancel and suffer the consequences.”



We appreciate your input in this survey. We’d like to check in with you first. What best describes how you’re feeling right now? (Choose all that apply.)





What best describes your role in the business events industry?



68% Business events professional

32% Supplier serving business events professionals

What region best represents where you do the majority of your business?



74% U.S.

8% Canada

9% APAC Region

8% EMEA region

1% Latin America



69% U.S.

6% Canada

12% APAC Region

11% EMEA region

2% Latin America

AUG

SEP

OCT

NOV

DEC

JAN

FEB

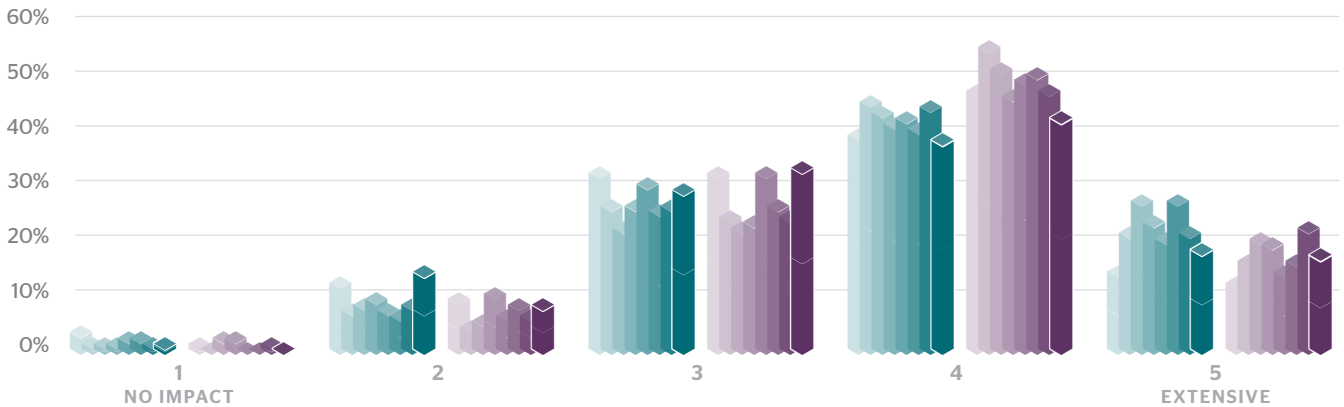
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PLANNER TRACK

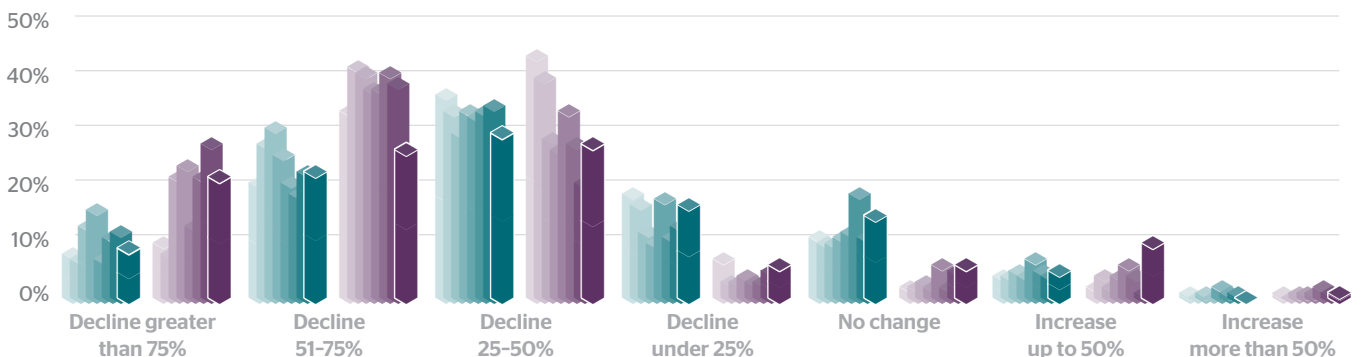
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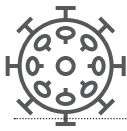


To what extent do you believe the rise in the use of digital-event technology will impact face-to-face event attendance at events in 2021 on a scale of 1 to 5.



What do you believe will be the overall revenue impact of COVID-19 on your events-related business for 2021?

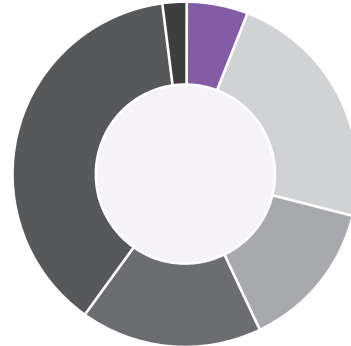
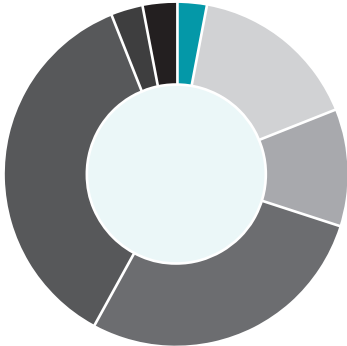




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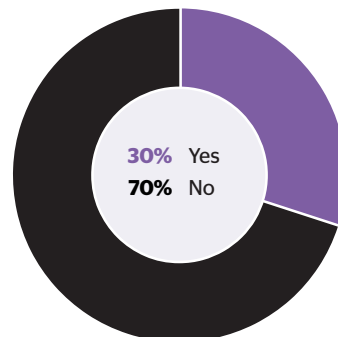
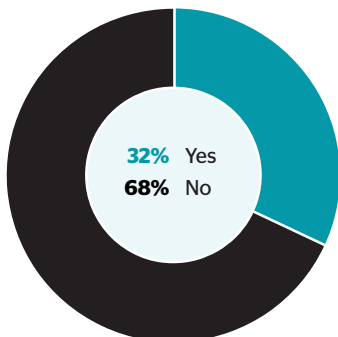
There has been a lot of press recently about the expected leisure travel surge in the coming months. What do you think this means for face-to-face event attendance?

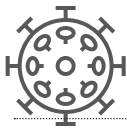


- 3%** People will travel to attend regional and domestic events Q2.
- 16%** People will travel to attend regional and domestic events Q3.
- 11%** People will travel to attend regional and domestic events Q4.
- 28%** There may be pent-up demand for F2F events, but budget cuts, the economy, and/or job insecurity will limit attendance
- 36%** There may be pent-up demand for F2F events, but until there is herd immunity, organizations will avoid assuming business travel risk.
- 3%** No change – attendees have grown accustomed to digital events and will participate virtually.
- 3%** Other

- 6%** People will travel to attend regional and domestic events Q2.
- 23%** People will travel to attend regional and domestic events Q3.
- 14%** People will travel to attend regional and domestic events Q4.
- 17%** There may be pent-up demand for F2F events, but budget cuts, the economy, and/or job insecurity will limit attendance
- 38%** There may be pent-up demand for F2F events, but until there is herd immunity, organizations will avoid assuming business travel risk.
- 2%** No change – attendees have grown accustomed to digital events and will participate virtually.
- 0%** Other

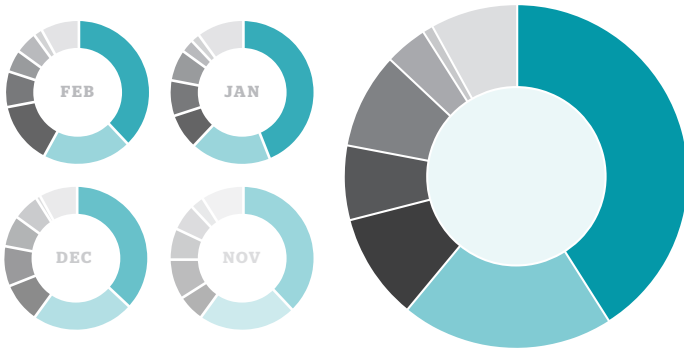
Once the vaccine is widely available, will you require attendees/staff/visitors to show proof of vaccination in order to participate in your face-to-face event?





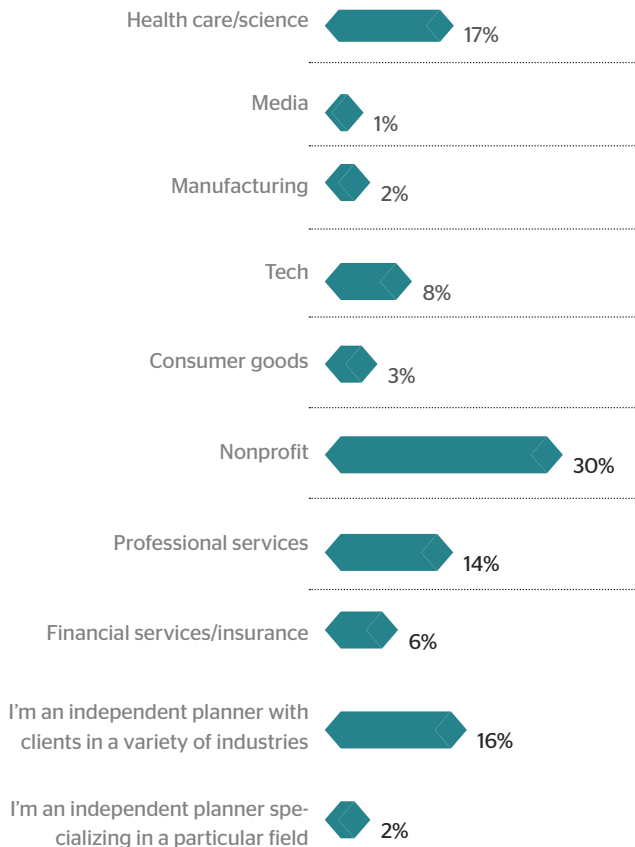
PLANNER TRACK

What is your biggest financial challenge with regard to planning a business event in 2021?
(Please choose one.)



- 41%** Budgeting/pricing for a hybrid (in-person + digital) events
- 20%** How to budget in terms of face-to-face attendance expectations
- 10%** Expenses related to enhanced hygiene and sanitary standards at a face-to-face event
- 7%** What to charge digital participants
- 9%** What to charge digital event exhibitors/sponsors
- 4%** Expenses related to event marketing and communications in a post COVID-19 world
- 1%** Deciding on registration pricing for face-to-face participants
- 8%** Other

What best describes the industry you represent?



PLANNERS SPEAK

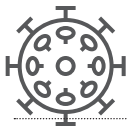
"None of the above are a challenge in my opinion. The biggest challenge is trying to determine revenue so you can properly set expenses. For virtual, there is no history to lean on for registration and exhibit/sponsor revenue. For in-person, the history is no longer a great indicator of the present."

"We do not charge for our events, our biggest issue with hybrid models will be increased costs for connectivity which could be a barrier for return to F2F. Facilities with built-in systems and no additional charge for this will get priority from us. We may need to look at moving away from traditional hotels and more to partnerships with universities, etc. which have the infrastructure in place."

"How to budget with expected declines in F2F attendance, sanitary and hygiene protocols, and added costs for hybrid."

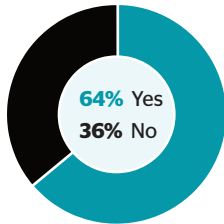
"How to predict expenses for an event six months into the future, knowing that the health and safety landscape is constantly changing (hopefully for the better)."

"Paying for the added technology for hybrid – basically double the AV cost, not to mention needing additional staff and staff time."

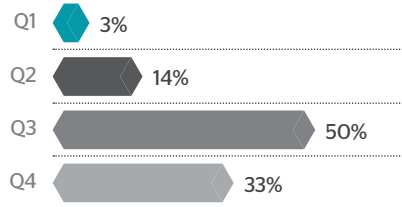


PLANNER TRACK

Are you planning an in-person event in 2021?



What is the anticipated date of your in-person event planned for 2021?



What is your planning window for in-person events in 2021?



- 33%** We are making a go/no-go decision within four months of event date.
- 18%** We are making a go/no-go decision within three months of event date.
- 25%** We are making a go/no-go decision within two months of event date.
- 24%** Other

PLANNERS SPEAK

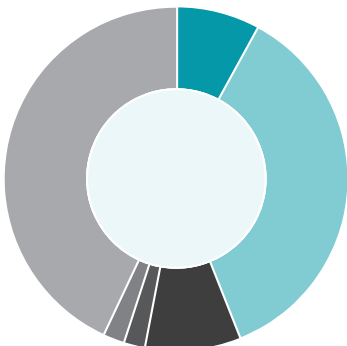
“We are already actively marketing booth space for eight live trade shows in the third and fourth quarters of 2021.”

“We are designing our in-person events so they can be converted to online events if needed at short notice. We are a go up until government restrictions change if there is an outbreak.”

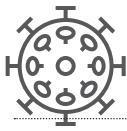
“We are past go/no go. We are only contracting meetings in Republican states. Staying clear of CA, NV, NM, etc. As long as the state allows us in, we are there.”

“We are making go/no-go decisions five to six months [prior to] the event date as we are feeling more confident with the vaccination rollout and feedback from members.”

What kind of overall registration numbers are you expecting for your planned 2021 in-person event vs. 2019 (or pre-pandemic 2020)?

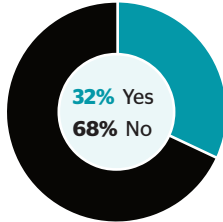


- 8%** Decline greater than 50%
- 36%** Decline up to 50%
- 9%** Same
- 2%** Increase up to 50%
- 2%** Increase of more than 50%
- 43%** Unable to estimate until we get closer to the scheduled event date due to a fluid COVID environment



PLANNER TRACK

Are you seeking out broadcasting facilities in your site-selection efforts for future hybrid events?



If you are planning a hybrid event, how do you foresee it taking shape?



PLANNERS SPEAK

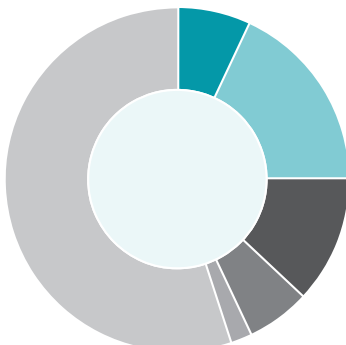
“Hub-and-spoke model held on separate dates over a three-week period with live streaming to a digital audience. We also have online only sessions that both digital and face-to-face audiences can access on the same online platform.”

“For one, I have a small regional group with streaming and separate online program with the ability to interact. For the other, more than 1,000 in-person (national) attendees with 2,000 virtual where content is streamed without a separate virtual agenda and no interaction between the in-person and virtual attendee.”

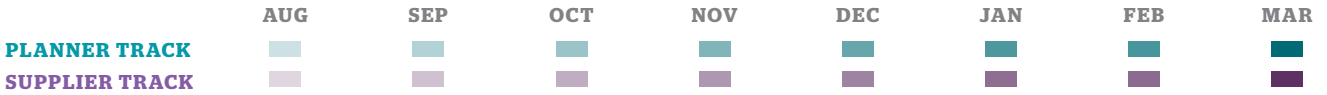
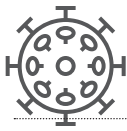
“Two separate experiences: in-person as it was pre-pandemic, and then a limited virtual option of our top 11 presentations pre-recorded. Limited virtual option will have a greatly reduced price; in-person will remain the same pricing as pre-pandemic.”

- 28%** Simultaneous, small in-person event with streaming video and separate online program for virtual audience, with ability for both audiences to interact via the event platform
- 11%** Simultaneous, small in-person event with streaming video and separate online program for virtual audience, without ability for both audiences to interact via the event platform
- 16%** Simultaneous, small in-person event with streaming video for virtual audience; no separate online content for digital participants
- 10%** Hub-and-spoke model: small regional in-person events held simultaneously with separate content for digital audience
- 35%** Other

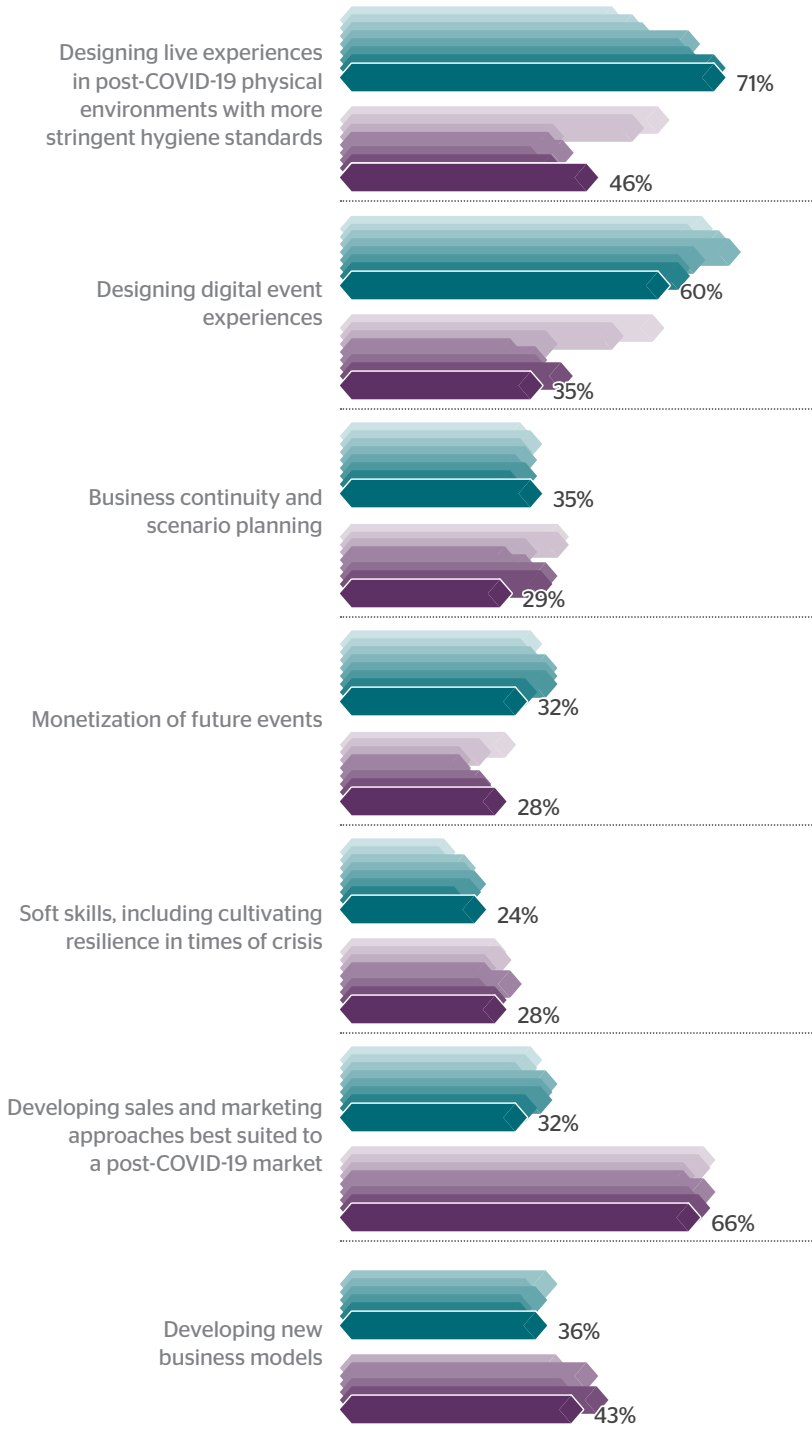
If you are planning a hybrid event in 2021, what kind of overall registration numbers are you expecting vs. 2019 (or pre-pandemic 2020)?



- 7%** Decline greater than 50%
- 18%** Decline up to 50%
- 12%** Same
- 6%** Increase up to 50%
- 2%** Increase of more than 50%
- 55%** Unable to estimate until we get closer to the scheduled event date due to a fluid COVID environment



In order to prepare professionally for success in the business events industry during the recovery, which new skills do you think you need to pursue/develop? (Choose all that apply.)



SUPPLIER PERSPECTIVE

“Collaborating with existing clients to figure out the best way to return to in-person events that works both for them, and us as a venue.”

“Suppliers need to work on their customer experience and sales skills to serve customers with the current needs in a world of new hires.”

PLANNERS SPEAK

“None; our association seems to be falling right back into pre-2020 mindset. I’m a bit disappointed as I thought the pandemic might have pushed us to modernize a bit.”

“Designing hybrid experiences that successfully allow digital and in-person cohorts to connect, communicate, and network.”

