

COVID-19 Recovery Dashboard

Survey conducted by Curt Wagner

Original design by Point Five

Analysis by Michelle Russell

Perhaps the 580 planners and suppliers who participated in *Convene's* latest COVID-19 Recovery Dashboard in mid-April (399 and 181, respectively) were primed to lean into their emotional side. When we invited the events industry to take part in the survey, we highlighted that we were focusing on mental health and wellbeing, in addition to asking some of the other questions we had been including in this monthly and bi-monthly survey.

That's one possible explanation why this particular data point stood out: A significantly higher percentage of respondents identified soft skills, including cultivating resilience in times of crisis, as an area of focus for their reskilling or skill-development efforts. Nearly 40 percent of planners checked this option in April vs. 24 percent in February; for suppliers, it was 45 percent vs. 34 percent. (Stay tuned for the results of the survey questions that explored mental health and wellbeing, which will be included in the May/June issue of *Convene*.)

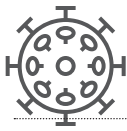
Another likely factor in the need for resilience is that their responses to other questions indicate that the industry is solidly in return-to-in-person mode, and that requires continued grit and flexibility — and increases pressure on both planners and suppliers to shore up losses and drive revenue. And lest we forget, a lot has happened in the world since February, including a war in Ukraine, skyrocketing fuel and food costs, and growing supply-chain challenges.

There were several key indications of that focus on face-to-face events: When we asked planners in February, less than half were planning in-person-only events in Q1-2; that shot up in April to nearly 7 out of 10 who

were working on exclusively in-person events for Q2-3. Around the same — more than one-third — are planning digital-only events, and one out of two planners in April (vs. two out of five in February) are organizing hybrid events. Planners said the in-person and online formats will take place simultaneously in some way for their hybrid events, similar to responses in February. But in our April survey, we gave respondents an additional response option — an asynchronous hybrid model — and 19 percent said they will offer a digital component related to but not held in parallel with the in-person event.

Planners were more optimistic in April than February about their in-person attendance levels compared to pre-pandemic times. Only a small percentage (4 percent in April vs. 7 percent in February) predicted their attendance would dip by more than one-half. One-quarter of planners vs. 36 percent in the February survey are now expecting a decline of up to one-half of their pre-pandemic attendee numbers; 18 percent vs. 10 percent think attendance will bounce back up to those pre-pandemic numbers; and 11 percent vs. 6 percent are anticipating that they will have up to 50 percent or more attendees than before COVID-19.

Even though they may be more hopeful, respondents remain realistic: More than one-third — the same percentage as in February — said they will be unable to estimate numbers until they get closer to their event date, acknowledging that the pandemic and its myriad impacts and other economic factors still make for an uncertain planning environment.



While both planners and suppliers expect the revenue impact related to their 2022 events will be somewhat lower when compared to the February responses, planners are finding it more difficult to predict the financial implications for their face-to-face events: Forty-one percent vs. 33 percent in the previous survey cited budgeting for in-person events as a major challenge. One planner attributed the angst to “rising costs of goods and services because of COVID, inflation, and the war in Ukraine. Budget impacts change daily.” Another planner connected those financial challenges and uncertainties to yet another expectation that has been layered on top of all the other demands — elevating the in-person experience: “Expenses related to event delivery to ensure we are bringing the in-person event back in a memorable and meaningful way.”

In case anyone is still wondering why so many checked “resilience” as a necessary skillset.

Curt Wagner is digital editor at *Convene*. Michelle Russell is *Convene's* editor in chief.

3 Results to Know

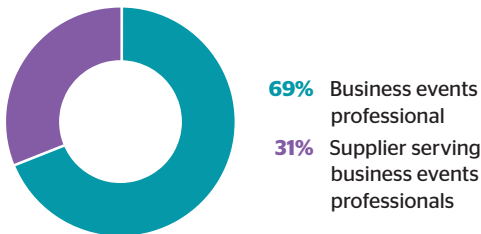
1) 7 out of 10 event organizers are planning an in-person-only event during Q2-3, up from under 50 percent who said the same in February for Q1-2.

2) Planners are more optimistic than in the previous survey about attendance levels at their in-person event: 18 percent vs. 10 percent in February think attendance will bounce back to pre-pandemic levels and only one-quarter vs. 36 percent of respondents in the February survey think they will see a drop of up to half of their pre-pandemic attendee level.

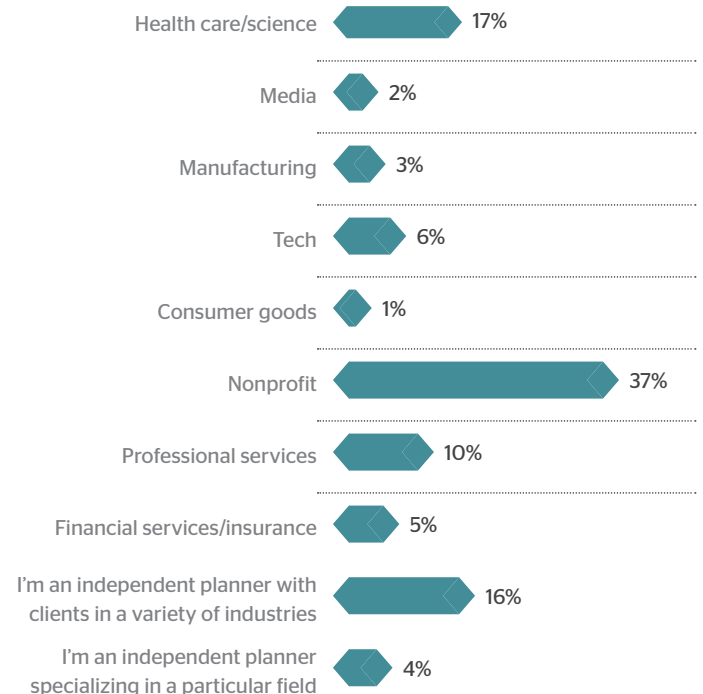
3) A significantly higher percentage of planners and suppliers identified soft skills, including cultivating resilience in times of crisis, as an area of focus for their reskilling or skill-development efforts compared to the February survey.

PLANNER TRACK

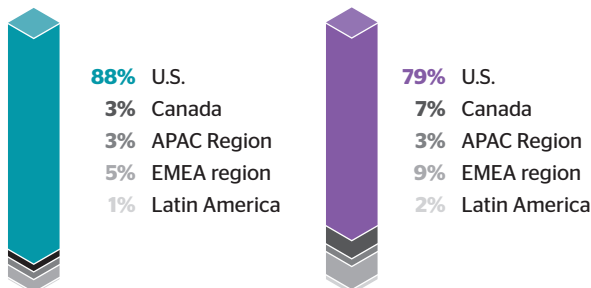
What best describes your role in the business events industry?

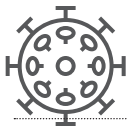


What best describes the industry you represent?



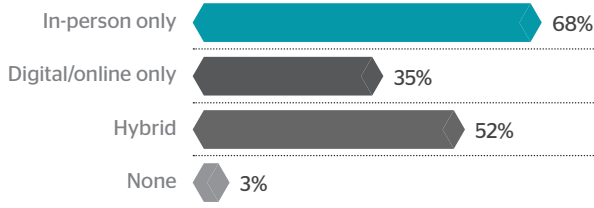
What region best represents where you do the majority of your business?



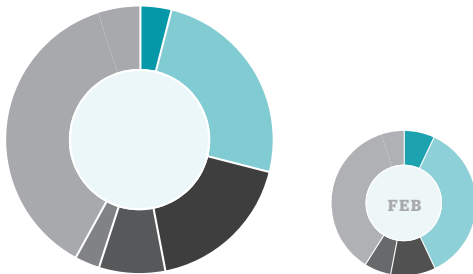


PLANNER TRACK

What type of event are you planning in Q2-3 2022? (Choose all that apply.)



What kind of overall registration numbers are you expecting for your planned 2022 in-person-only event vs. 2019 (or pre-pandemic 2020)?



- 4% Decline greater than 50%
- 25% Decline up to 50%
- 18% Same
- 8% Increase up to 50%
- 3% Increase of more than 50%
- 37% Unable to estimate until we get closer to the scheduled event date due to a fluid COVID environment
- 5% N/A



What is your biggest financial challenge with regard to planning a business event in Q2-Q3 2022? (Please choose one.)



- 21% Budgeting/pricing for a hybrid (in-person + digital) events
- 41% How to budget in terms of face-to-face attendance expectations
- 7% Navigating registration timelines/deadlines to budget for a hybrid event
- 1% What to charge digital participants
- 3% What to charge digital event exhibitors/sponsors
- 9% Expenses related to event marketing and communications in a post COVID-19 world
- 4% Deciding on registration pricing for face-to-face participants
- 14% Other

PLANNERS SPEAK

“Skyrocketing costs of equipment, labor, food & beverage.”

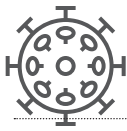
“How to recover from substantial losses due to a virtual-only meeting.”

“ATTRITION PENALTIES!!!!”

“The continuously growing trend of participants waiting until the final 30 days pre-event to commit to attending. (How many participants to budget and plan for?)”

“Expenses related to event delivery to ensure we are bringing the in-person event back in a memorable and meaningful way.”

“Events are providing tighter timelines while exhibit houses are extending timelines; everywhere prices are significantly up and service is down.”



PLANNER TRACK

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



- 15%** 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
- 19%** A digital component related to but not held in parallel with the in-person event
- 8%** 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
- 2%** Hub-and-spoke model: small regional in-person events held simultaneously with separate content for digital audience
- 33%** N/A
- 7%** Other

PLANNERS SPEAK

“700 onsite; general sessions streamed live; breakout recorded for future watching.”

“We are hosting our large in-person annual meeting where we are streaming our plenaries and 6 of our 16 concurrent sessions to a virtual audience.”

“In-person conference & trade show, with digital streaming of limited content during show days. Audiences will not be able to interact. Captured content will be available after the show on demand, but no separate digital programming is planned for pre- or post-show.”

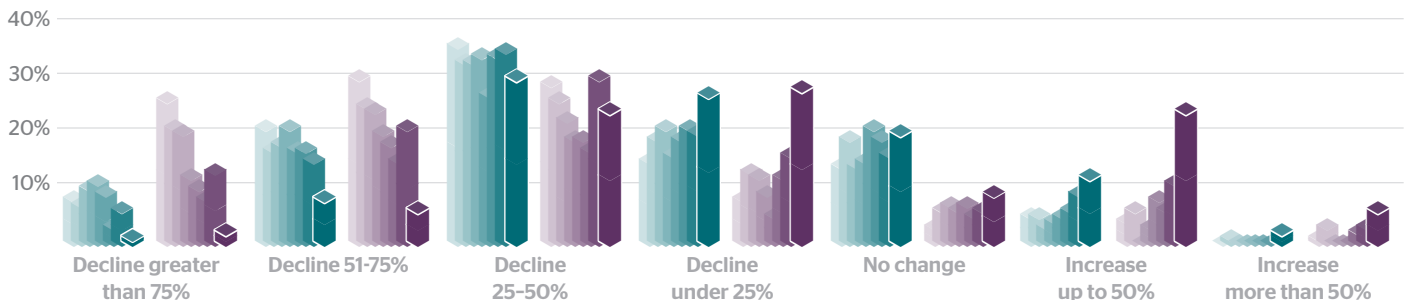
“Large in-person events with live-streamed digital events. Also capture and resell for asynchronous digital.”

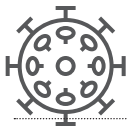
“I held a hybrid event of more than 1,130 sessions. It went off like clockwork. No issues.”

“Simultaneous, large in-person event with streaming video for virtual audience with ability for both audiences to interact via the event platform. Didactic content recorded and available to members on LMS for next 3 years (to claim CME).”

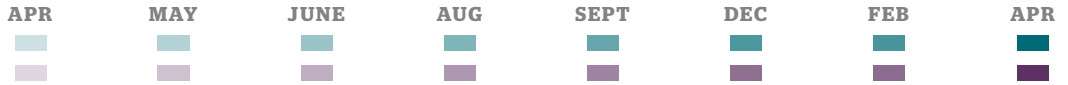


What do you believe will be the overall revenue impact of COVID-19 on your events-related business for 2022?

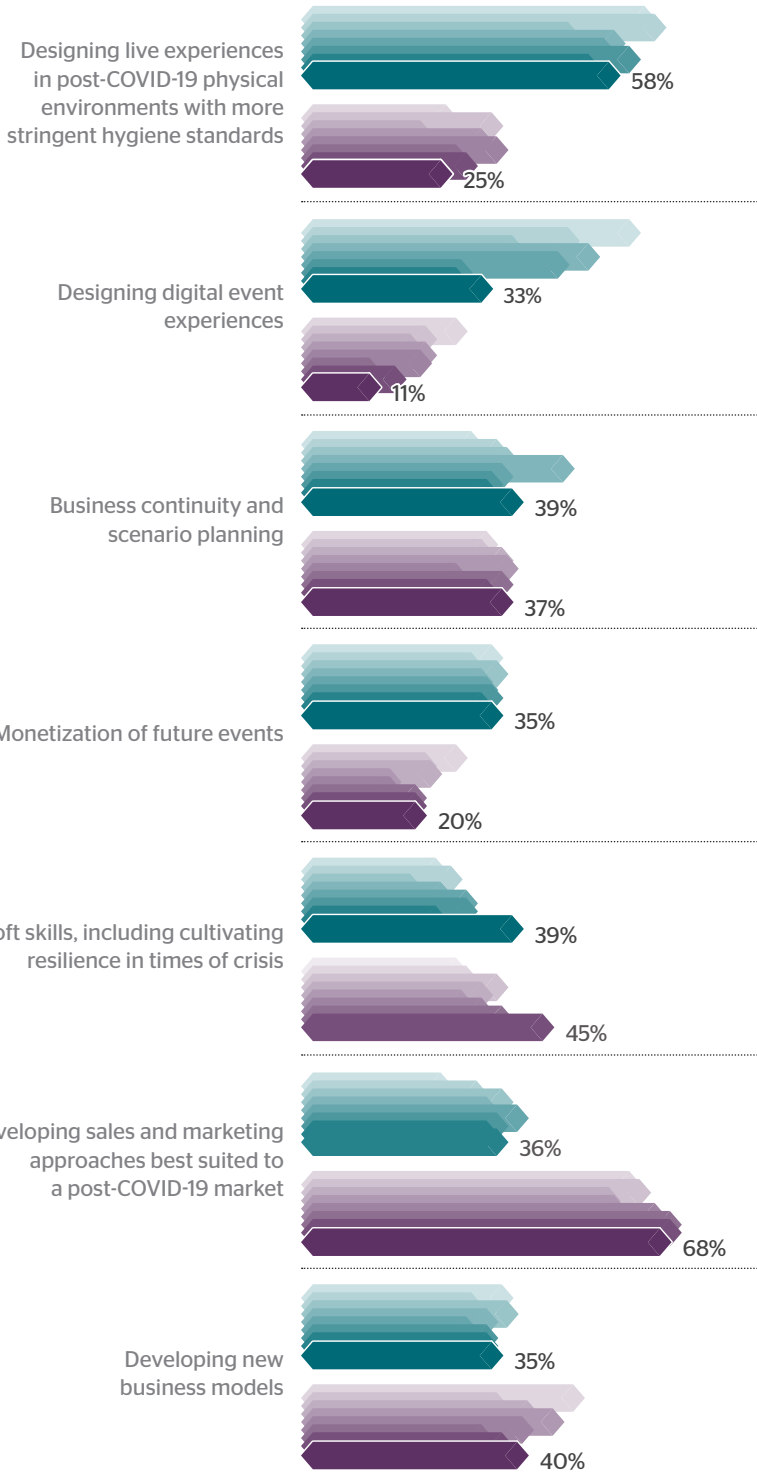




PLANNER TRACK
SUPPLIER TRACK



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.)



59%

of planners are focusing their skills on designing hybrid event experiences.

PLANNERS SPEAK

"Improved hotel negotiation skills."

"Hiring! Where did all the people go and why does nobody want to leave their homes at all? I can't fill a position I have had open for five months because I can't get anyone to come into the office (and we are WFH two days)."

"Ability to deal with constantly changing staff and staff burn-out (our own, but also partner staff) as well as decreased customer service levels."

"Don't just take our 2019 portfolio and approach and recreate it in 2022. Challenge ourselves to question what we do and why we do it."

SUPPLIER PERSPECTIVE

"Designing and contingency planning for events in understaffed venues and when facing supply chain inconsistencies."

"Building a DEI lens. Staff, talent, society, and clients are getting younger and more diverse every day. Learning to adapt to this change. A new sense of requirements and purpose is needed so we all prepare for success in 2022 and beyond."