

CMP SERIES

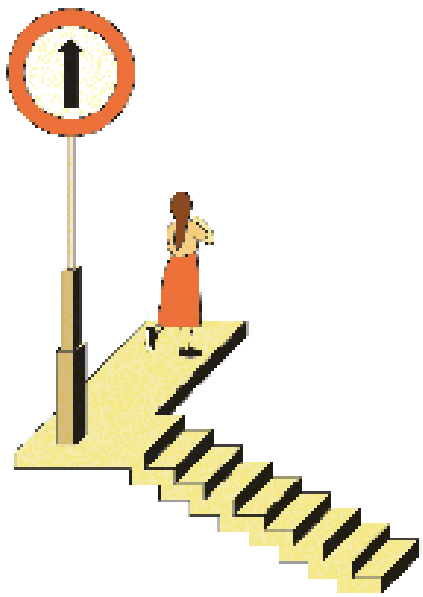
Adaptation Over Reaction

Convene's 2026 Meetings Market Survey reveals a profession navigating rising costs, embracing AI, and reimagining the meeting experience with cautious confidence. Faced with persistent uncertainty, respondents demonstrate a willingness to adapt, innovate, and plan for a future where change has become the norm.

Survey analysis by Gabrielle Weiss with survey administration by Magdalina Atanassova

Illustrations by Irena Gajic

Convene's 2026 Meetings Market Survey reveals a profession navigating rising costs, embracing AI, and reimagining the meeting experience with cautious confidence. We see that seasoned professionals are no longer expecting stability and have learned how to operate successfully without it. That is a much more powerful conclusion than simply saying the industry is optimistic.



The last few years, our industry has largely been defined by recovery and disruption. This year, our survey analysis indicates that we are moving into a phase of recalibration. Respondents to *Convene*'s Meetings Market Survey report continuing pressure from rising costs and economic uncertainty, but they also express confidence in attendance growth, greater comfort with artificial intelligence, and a willingness to rethink how meetings are designed and delivered. Together, their responses paint a picture of an industry that has stopped reacting and started adapting.

For meeting and event professionals, uncertainty has become familiar terrain. Inflation continues to influence budgets. Attendee expectations keep evolving. Artificial intelligence is rapidly changing how work gets done. And economic and geopolitical concerns remain difficult to ignore.

Yet the results of *Convene*'s 2026 Meetings Market Survey suggest that planners are not operating in crisis mode. Instead, respondents appear to be settling into a new mindset, one that balances realism with optimism. Their responses reveal a profession that has shifted from reacting to disruption toward adapting for the future.

The survey, conducted among *Convene* subscribers who opted to participate in reader research, drew responses from experienced professionals across the meetings and events sector. The approximate margin of error is 7 percent.

Greater than 60 percent of respondents reported having more than 20 years of industry experience, with the majority holding senior leadership positions — 51 percent identified as a director or executive vice president while 18 percent identified as a president, CEO or owner.

The age range shows the majority of respondents (62 percent) were between 45-64 years of age and predominantly female. Sixty percent of respondents are event planners and organizers while 34 percent are suppliers. Almost half (48 percent) work for an association, 15 percent are independent event producers, 13 percent are corporate planners, and 12 percent work for nonprofit organizations.

Survey participants' collective perspective offers a snapshot of how *Convene* subscribers who are also seasoned industry professionals view the opportunities and challenges ahead. We are thankful to our readers who took time to share their thoughts and experience for this proprietary survey.

Managing Complexity

If there is one finding that captures the current mood among respondents, it is that confidence and concern are coexisting.

When asked to characterize their outlook for the future, many respondents chose measured responses over extremes. While roughly one in five described

themselves as satisfied and optimistic and nearly a quarter said they felt calm and confident, the largest share indicated their outlook "depends on the day."

That response may be the most revealing.

Meeting professionals today are navigating an environment filled with competing pressures. We saw this pattern emerge in our annual survey, published in our October issue, in which responses revealed the belief that demand for in-person events remains strong while at the same time budgets require constant scrutiny. New technologies promise efficiency while raising questions about governance and implementation. Stakeholders and event participants continue to expect more personalized and engaging experiences, even as planners are asked to do more with finite resources.

Rather than suggesting uncertainty, the responses indicate a profession growing comfortable operating amid complexity — and some ambiguity.

Many respondents acknowledged ongoing challenges but described them as realities to navigate rather than obstacles that threaten the viability of events. Adaptability, flexibility, and strategic thinking emerged repeatedly as essential skills for the future.

Inflation Remains the Dominant Pressure

While optimism remains evident throughout the survey, nine in 10 respondents reported that inflation had affected their events in some way. Rising costs continue to influence everything from venue selection and food and beverage spending to audiovisual investments and attendee travel.

Food and beverage costs remain a particularly significant concern. It was both the budget line item most frequently trimmed

About Our Survey and Participants

How many people are employed by your organization?

32%	**1 to 20**
16%	21 to 50
16%	51 to 100
17%	101 to 300
4%	301 to 500
15%	Over 500

Where is your organization headquartered?

92%	**North America**
3%	Latin America and Caribbean
3%	Europe
0%	Africa
1%	Middle East
1%	Asia-Pacific

What best describes your title?

7%	Coordinator/Specialist
21%	Manager
31%	**Director**
20%	Executive Level/VP
10%	Owner
8%	President/CEO
3%	other

Have your attendee demographics changed significantly in the past year?

27%	Yes more younger attendees (e.g., Gen Z)
5%	Yes more international attendees
7%	Yes fewer attendees from key markets
52%	**No significant change**
9%	Not sure
1%	other

"Respondents are no longer defined by recovery. Nor are they waiting for uncertainty to disappear. Instead, they are adapting to a business environment characterized by ongoing change."

by respondents and the expense category most expect to consume the largest share of their event budgets next year.

Twenty-nine percent of our respondents indicated that those costs continue to climb. At the same time, attendee expectations for quality experiences have not declined.

Interestingly, the survey suggests that organizations are becoming increasingly strategic in how they respond to financial pressures. Rather than implementing broad reductions, respondents described more targeted approaches that focus on preserving value while controlling costs.

That evolution may reflect a broader maturation within the profession regarding persistent challenges. Relatively few respondents appear to be retreating from events; instead, they appear to be adjusting their strategies to ensure meetings remain effective and financially sustainable. After all, there are strong indicators that live events are a thriving sector and positioned for growth in an AI era.

A Technology Turning Point

Some of the most striking findings in this year's survey center on artificial intelligence.

Just a few years ago, conversations about AI often focused on future possibilities. Today, for many respondents, the technology is already part of everyday work.

A substantial majority reported using AI tools personally, while many indicated their organizations have already adopted AI or are actively exploring implementation.

Despite widespread adoption, very few believe AI will significantly reduce staffing needs. Instead, nearly 70 percent anticipate a future in which teams maintain similar staffing levels while developing new skills and capabilities, and fewer than 4 percent reported they anticipate reducing staff levels due to AI.

That distinction is important. Rather than replacing human expertise, respondents appear to see AI as enhancing it. Strategic thinking, relationship management, creativity, negotiation, and community-building remain central to event success. Technology may streamline tasks, but respondents continue to view human judgment as indispensable.

The results point toward an industry that is embracing innovation while remaining realistic about its limitations — at least at this juncture as humanity learns to use the evolving tool.

Redesigning the Event Experience

The survey also reveals how meeting professionals are evolving the attendee experience.

Respondents to our survey indicated growing emphasis on intentional networking opportunities, with more than 20 percent adding more interactive sessions and 30 percent adding intentional networking. Slightly more than 75 percent of respondents are designing events for a multigenerational workforce.

Those priorities suggest a broader shift in how organizations define event value.

For years, attendance numbers served as one of the primary indicators of success. While attendance remains important, respondents increasingly appear focused on the quality of engagement that occurs once participants arrive.

Taken together, these findings suggest that meeting professionals are rethinking the event experience from the attendee's perspective. The goal is no longer simply to gather people in a room. Increasingly, it is to create meaningful experiences that justify participants' investments of time, attention, and resources.

Steady Momentum

Despite continuing challenges, respondents generally expect positive momentum in the year ahead.

Thirty-eight percent reported attendance growth at their most recent events, while more

Test Time

Earn one clock hour of certification by visiting **convene.media/convene-cmp-series** to answer questions about this survey.

The Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) is a registered trademark of the Events Industry Council.

than 40 percent said attendance remained the same. Looking forward, 45 percent anticipate attendance increases over the next year and 36 percent expect attendance levels to hold steady.

Budget expectations show a similar pattern. While respondents remain hyper-aware of cost pressures, 43 percent expect financial resources to increase in the coming year and 39 percent foresee budgets remaining unchanged.

These findings do not point to unrestrained optimism; they reflect confidence grounded in experience. Based on the demographic information, these respondents understand the realities facing the profession. They recognize the pressures created by inflation, changing technologies, and evolving stakeholder and participant expectations. Yet they also see opportunities for growth, innovation, and continued (and growing) relevance in the meetings and events sector.

That combination of pragmatism and confidence may be the survey's most important takeaway.

Looking Ahead

The results of *Convene*'s 2026 Meetings Market Survey portray a profession that may be entering a new phase. Respondents to our survey are no longer defined by recovery. Nor are they waiting for uncertainty to disappear. Instead, they are adapting to a business environment characterized by ongoing change.

They appear to be incorporating inflation and uncertainty into long-term planning. They are embracing AI while investing in human expertise where they can. They are redesigning events to better serve increasingly sophisticated audience needs and wants. And they are doing so while maintaining confidence in the enduring value of face-to-face experiences.

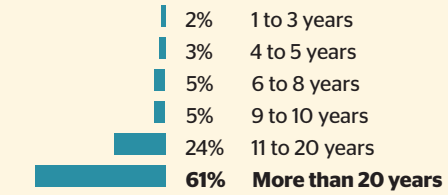
The future may not feel entirely predictable, but respondents appear prepared to meet it.

For a profession built on bringing people together, that may be the strongest signal of all: not confidence that challenges will disappear, but confidence in the ability to navigate whatever comes next.

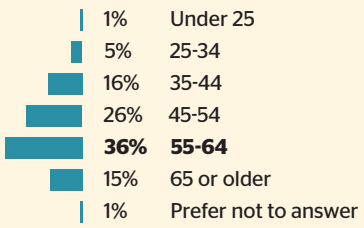
Gabrielle Weiss is editor in chief of *Convene*.
Magdalina Atanassova is the digital media editor of *Convene*.

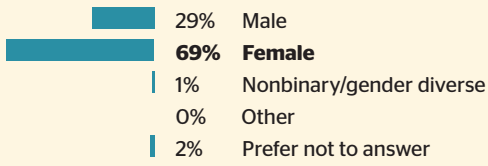
About Our Survey and Participants CONTINUED

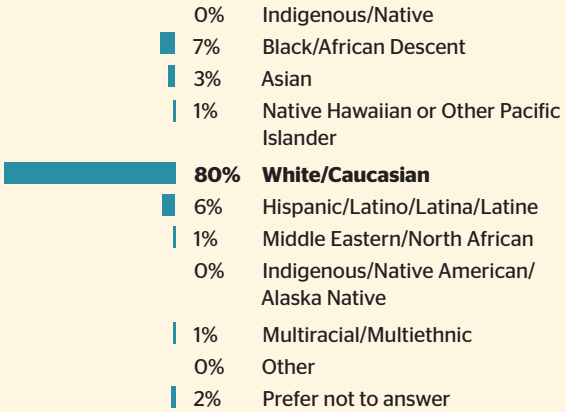
How many years of experience do you have in the meetings and events industry?



What is your age, gender, and race?

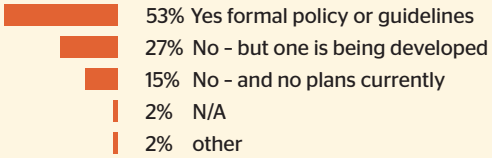




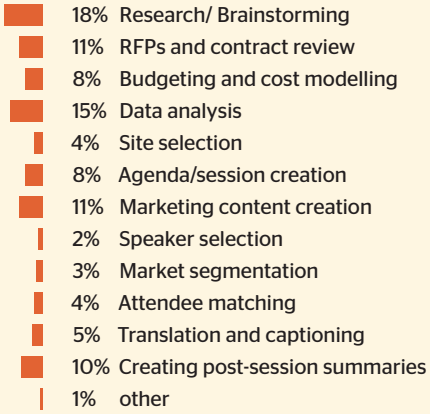


Using AI

Does your organization have a policy or guidelines in place for the use of generative AI?



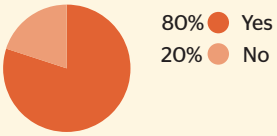
How is your organization using AI?



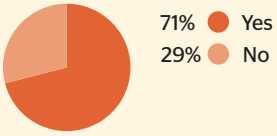
WHAT *CONVENE* READERS ARE SAYING

"Resist it at your peril."

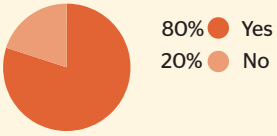
Do you use AI tools in your work?



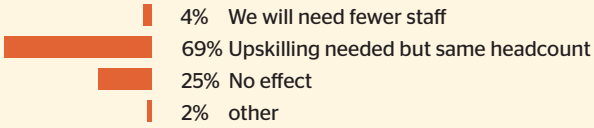
Does your organization use AI tools to support event strategy and planning, or plan to do so in the future?



Do you see AI becoming a critical tool for meeting planners in the next year?

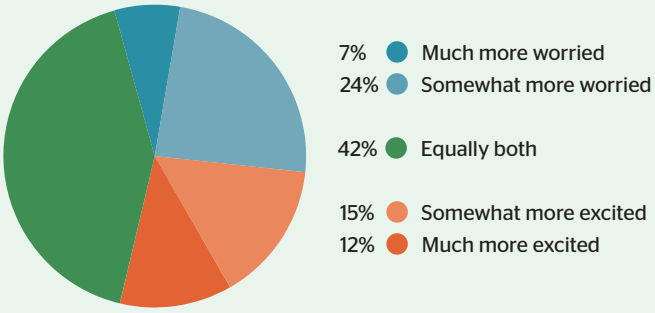


How do you expect staffing needs to change as AI and other technologies continue to evolve?

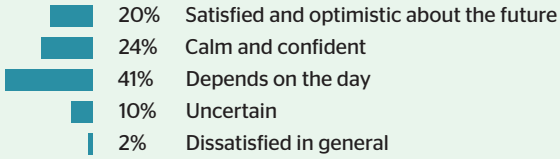


Thoughts and Feelings

Are you more worried or more excited about the future?

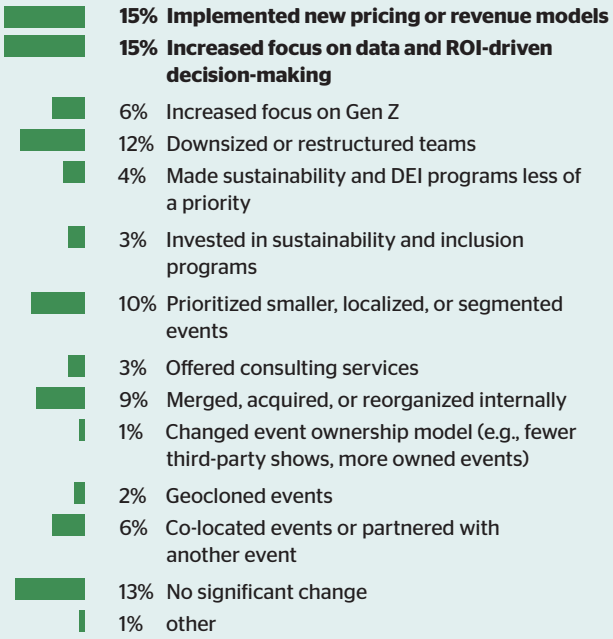


How would you describe your current work outlook?

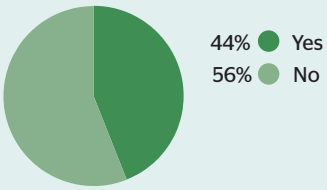


Budgets

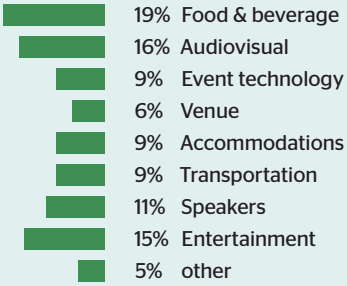
Has your organization's business model changed in the past year?



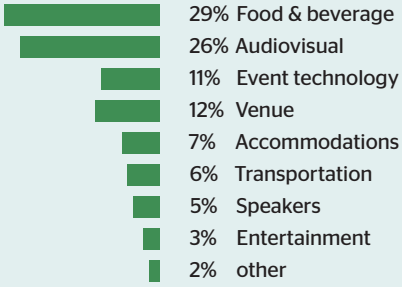
Did you decrease any budget items this year?



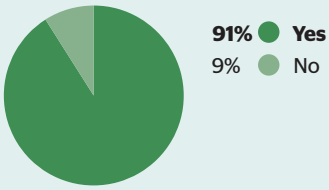
Which event budget items have you trimmed?



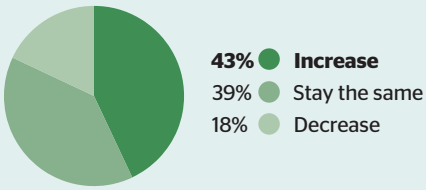
What will be the biggest expense item in your budget next year?



Have your event(s) been impacted by inflation?



How do you expect your event budget to change in the next year?

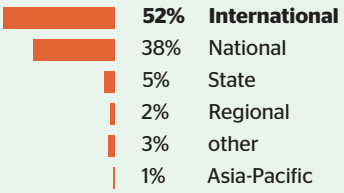


WHAT *CONVENE* READERS ARE SAYING

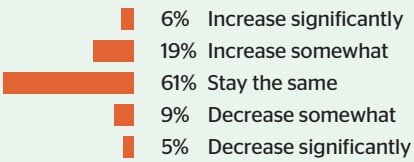
"The challenge is maintaining the quality and the attendee experience guests have come to expect while costs continue to rise."

National

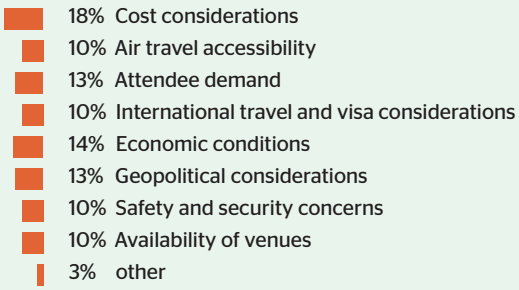
Which best describes the scope of your organization?



Looking ahead over the next two years, do you expect your organization's interest in organizing meetings and events in the United States to change?



Which factors are influencing your outlook on producing meetings and events in the United States?

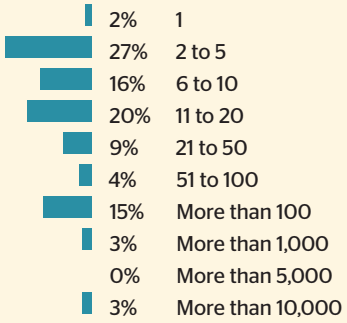


WHAT *CONVENE* READERS ARE SAYING

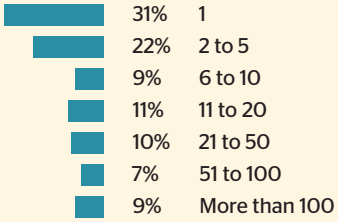
"People need to talk with each other."

Digital, Hybrid, and In-Person Meetings

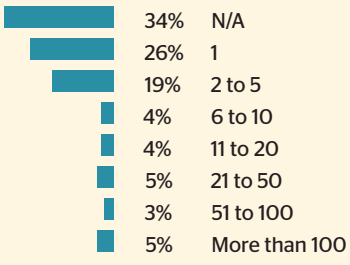
How many in-person meetings does your organization plan each year?



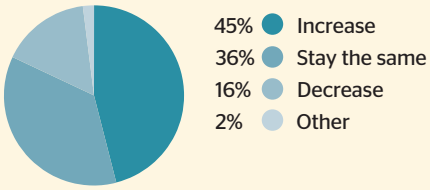
How many virtual meetings does your organization plan each year?



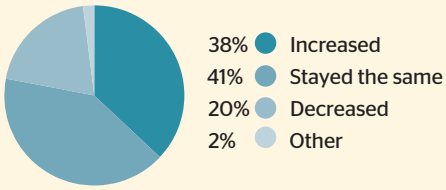
How many hybrid meetings does your organization plan each year?



How do you expect in-person attendance at your events to change over the next year?

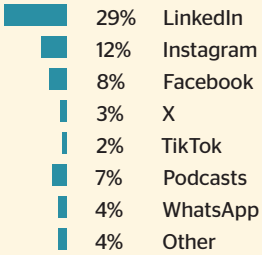


Compared with the previous edition(s) of the same event(s), how did attendance at your most recent in-person event change?

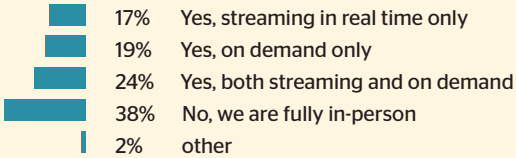


Digital Engagement

What are your favorite digital channels to engage with the industry?



Do you offer a digital version of any part of your in-person event(s) content?



WHAT *CONVENE* READERS ARE SAYING

"People are craving authentic connection."

"No matter what technology comes along, relationships are still built in person."

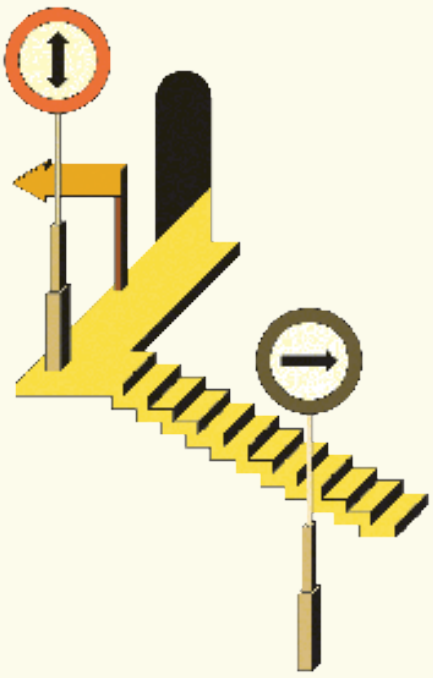
"Face-to-face interaction remains the most valuable part of the meeting experience."

WHAT *CONVENE* READERS ARE SAYING

"I am equally excited and worried about what comes next."

"Those who adapt will thrive."

"The future belongs to organizations that are willing to evolve."



Sustainability

What sustainability practices have you adopted in the last year?

16%	Developed social or environmental projects, initiatives, or activities to drive sustainable impact
9%	Developed a clear sustainability strategy and plan
7%	Increased sustainability reporting
14%	Chosen a venue that produces sustainability impact reports
5%	Use international set of standards
4%	Hired/trained staff
8%	Created an internal sustainability policy
4%	Added a sustainability budget line
14%	Included sustainability in RFPs
20%	Other

In which event phase do you start to actively design with sustainability in mind?

13%	Sales/Concept generation (sustainability in contracts)
7%	Goal-setting (~8 months out)
13%	Internal team planning (~6-7 months out)
12%	Supplier negotiations (~5 months out)
1%	Data measurement planning (~3-4 months out)
2%	Communications to delegates (~1-2 months out)
31%	We do not design with sustainability in mind
20%	It varies by event
2%	Other

Which of the following practices are currently part of your events?

In practice before 2026		Added during 2026
56%	Outdoor activities/events	8%
41%	Wellness initiatives (like yoga, sound baths, meditation, quiet rooms)	13%
31%	White space in the program	5%
67%	Specific educational paths in the program	9%
61%	More intentional networking	30%
65%	Included more interactive sessions	23%

How has your organization's commitment to sustainability at your events changed over the last year?

15%	Increased
73%	Stayed the same
7%	Decreased
5%	Other