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MEETINGS MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS: **BUILDING FOR CHANGE**



SECTION 1: INTRODUCING THE MATURITY MODEL

Meetings programs built for change

Strategic meetings management programs are evolving faster than ever. Factors like an increased procurement focus on meeting spend, the rise in importance of the attendee experience, the need for demonstrating clear measurement on meeting success, risk and security concerns and the explosion of innovative technologies have all contributed to the ongoing evolution of how organizations are approaching their meetings management programs. More recently, the meetings and events industry has been rocked by the global pandemic caused by COVID-19.

The effect that this will have on meetings programs is still unfolding, but it's already clear that it will have a significant impact to the industry, both in the short and long term. Those with existing programs have been able to articulate the value through the ability to act quickly and provide meaningful and actionable data in real time. This will become a key focus for other organizations that were not able to respond as quickly or easily, or could only tell a part of the story due to disparate meetings processes and systems of record.

Within this report we'll look at the reasons meetings programs are changing and the trends that are being observed across organizations. We'll also look at how organizations can use this information to guide their meetings strategy and position their programs in order to adapt to the inevitable evolution.

Factors influencing meetings management program design

From our vantage point across several clients with meetings program of varying maturity, the factors listed below are some examples that are influencing how meetings programs are evolving.

- A need to do more with less
- Global pandemic
- Globalization
- Duty of care
- Attendee experience & brand consistency
- Economic performance
- Risk management

The start of this evolution was recognized in 2017 when the existing GBTA SMM diagram was updated¹. The crucial role of engaged stakeholders was moved to the center of the diagram while event objectives and participant experience were added as new components. Technology was moved from the center to the outer circle, representing that although important, it's a component and enabler of a meetings management program, rather than the anchoring factor. These changes reflect a shift in the traditional approach to SMM that we've also witnessed across our clients where the strategic value of meetings from both an ROI AND ROE perspective has become a greater focus. This is particularly evident in "high touch events" that may fall under marketing and might have previously been outliers to a meetings program, where there's an increasing need to include these as part of an organization's SMMP.

Overall, it demonstrates a change in focus within the industry from a historic emphasis on meetings as a procurement initiative to deliver savings, to a more all-encompassing solution focused on user experience, meetings effectiveness, and broader organizational impact into meetings management program design.

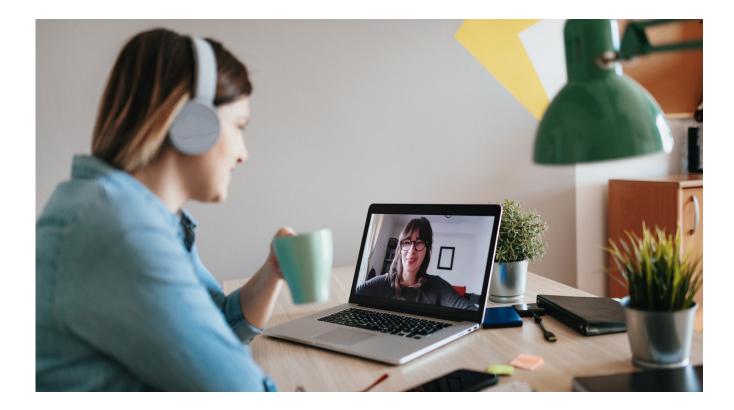


BCD M&E Meetings Management Maturity Model

Based on the evolving nature of meetings management programs, at the end of 2018 we revamped our existing maturity model, expanding the previous version to now have twelve comprehensive dimensions against which an organization can measure program evolution. The model progresses from unmanaged programs all the way to programs that are leading – and this can be broken down against each program component.



STRATEGY	ENGAGEMENT & MEASUREMENT
POLICY	PAYMENT
MEETING REGISTRATION & APPROVAL	REPORTING
STRATEGIC SOURCING	PREFERRED SUPPLIERS
PROCESS	STAKEHOLDERS
TECHNOLOGY	RESOURCE MODEL



SECTION 2: TRENDS AND INSIGHTS

The results

Using the BCD M&E Meetings Maturity Model as a framework, results were collated from across our meetings management account base².

Top performing areas

Greater program maturity was found in areas that are typically put in place first when a meetings management program is established within an organization. For example, when building an initial business case for having a meetings program, a **strategy** must be identified in order to gain support from leadership and show value to the overall organization. Also, the ability to track meetings and increase visibility of activity is often addressed in the first phase of a meetings program. This is best achieved by having a **meetings policy** in place that guides users to **register their meetings** centrally and addresses any approval criteria and process that must be followed.



Development areas

The survey identified the following as development areas for organizations.

Managing **payments** successfully for meeting and events services is a consistent pain point for many organizations, especially within global programs. Realities such as decentralized finance functions and varied, often manual processes create complexities when seeking a single process for paying, reconciling and controlling meetings and event spend.

Another development area is **engagement and measurement**. With the relatively new inclusion of ROE, organizations are being challenged to incorporate this as part of their meetings program design. Successful tactics include increasing the voice of marketing as part of the stakeholder engagement strategy so it's seen as an important measurement alongside traditional cost savings metrics. Organizations that do this best incorporate their "high touch events" into their meetings management programs and don't view them as outliers. With recent focus on virtual meetings, having strategies in place to engage attendees throughout their virtual journey has become an increased necessity, and will have a sustained influence in this area. Methodologies for measuring success do not need to be overly complex and can be allowed to evolve over time as a program matures. For example, a basic guideline for virtual meetings might be a benchmark of 20% of all meetings to be operated in a virtual environment.

Maturity in terms of **process** development is also highlighted as a development area for organizations, with a lack of standardized SOPs being a challenge. For global programs, this can be overcome by creating global foundational steps or key controls, however allowing for flexibility in local delivery where necessary. These are measured through SLAs/KPIs that can be adjusted to a market or region, and should be dynamic in order to react to shifting priorities in the program strategy.

ENGAGEMENT & MEASUREMENT



Maturity category breakdown

Of the accounts surveyed, 64% fell within the **performing** category. This means their programs are fairly robust, with a meetings management strategy and policy in place that is implemented across more than one region. The success of the program is being clearly measured, processes are standardized and reporting is consolidated. It's not always possible or appropriate for organizations to strive to be leading in all program components, which is why focusing on specific areas to optimize is often the most appropriate strategy in order to see measurable success.



Maturity by spend

We found that the tipping point for accounts to move from performing to leading on the maturity index is a managed meeting spend of **\$30M+** per year. It appears that at this threshold, programs gain momentum and that the value of the meetings program is recognized by leadership. This provides focus and there is investment in developing the program further and expanding the benefits across the organization.

MATURITY BY SPEND € \$30M LEADING

Meetings technology

Unsurprisingly, the use of Cvent dominates. However, 22% of organizations surveyed are using a combination of technologies to support their program needs, indicating that there is not a one-size-fits all platform. This could be due to the use of different marketing tools, regional technology usage variations or the increasing focus by organizations to support their small or simple meetings which have typically not been supported by a company's central meetings management technology. A challenge organizations often face when reviewing technology for small or simple meetings is that the definition of meetings that fall into this category varies by company. Organizations who are leading in terms of their approach to technology for small and simple meetings have a clearly documented view of their technology strategy, and work backwards to implement the right combination of tools and integrations in order to achieve the best user experience with an optimized process flow.



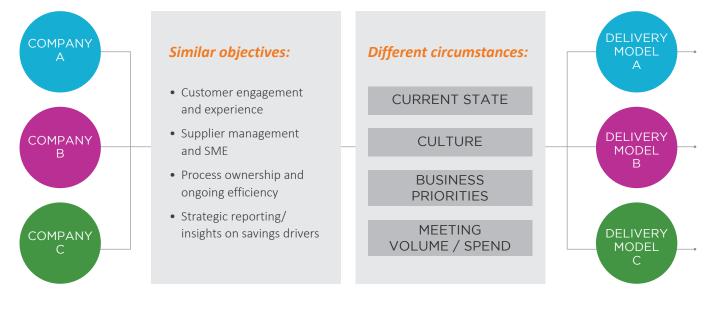
No one size fits all

There are many factors that influence how a company approaches their meetings management strategy, framework and solution for delivery. A company may have very similar objectives but factors such as current state, company culture, policy vs guideline, business priorities and meeting spend and volume can mean that the solution required to implement the program varies greatly between organizations. Discovery and strategy guidance from an established meetings management company can help by sharing best practices and suggesting a delivery model that takes into consideration the above mentioned variables.

The goals and focus of a program are often greatly impacted by where meetings sit within the organization. For example, a program that reports into the security division may be primarily driven by duty of care considerations and risk management, and one that reports into marketing may first focus on content and engagement. These goals will be in addition to the wider benefits but result in not one program looking the same as another.

For context, we find that 70% of financial services clients report into the marketing division. Within professional services, 80% is split between the internal services division, marketing and procurement. In life sciences, the trend sits at 60% reporting directly into procurement. All programs, however, have a tie into procurement at some level, even if this is not a direct reporting line³.

MEETINGS MANAGEMENT SERVICE DELIVERY





VARIATION BY INDUSTRY

Life Sciences: Program observations

Focus on meeting validity drives program evolution

Whereas the initial focus for organizations within this industry was managing compliance and cost, more recently the rise in the need to prove meeting validity has meant that meeting gatekeepers are increasingly challenging a meeting's purpose. This means there's an increased need to measure ROI/ROE and prove value through meeting outcome(s).

HCP engagement focus has increased

Focus on continual HCP engagement throughout the life cycle of a meeting has meant that organizations are increasingly looking at innovative ways to engage HCPs and measure their engagement strategies. A strong engagement strategy is pivotal in attracting HCPs to attend, as many of the same HCPs are invited to a number of meetings by competing organizations.

Third-party outsourcing strategies

In terms of third-party outsourcing strategies, organizations within life sciences tend to use multiple agencies both regionally and globally due to the segmentation of meeting types between agencies.

Top performing areas Strategy, policy, registration, approvals.

Development areas Process, payment, reporting.

Financial: Program observations

Centralized meetings and events teams

Organizations within this vertical often have an established and centralized meetings and events team that is either staffed internally or outsourced to a third party. With cost cutting initiatives taking place and additional headcount not always being approved, innovative uses of resource management are being increasingly explored. For example, the lead agency model is more prevalent within the financial services space than other verticals, which results in a controlled and efficient use of resources to manage an organization's meetings program.

Established preferred supplier programs

Most organizations have a preferred meetings and events hotel program in place, and some either have or are looking at enhancing their programs to also incorporate preferred programs in non-hotel categories such as audio-visual and ground transportation. Many also have MSAs with non-traditional venues with high frequency use in local markets.

Increased focus on incorporating engagement metrics

Although engagement & measurement is highlighted as an area for development, strategies are being investigated to weave engagement metrics into the overall program measurement. Although mobile apps are being used for larger meetings, it's often a stand-alone engagement rather than part of the overall meetings program strategy.

Top performing areas

Strategic sourcing, resource model, reporting.

Development areas

Engagement & measurement, technology, preferred suppliers.

Professional services: Program observations

Driving program adoption

A major focus for many organizations in this sector is driving program adoption and increasing the number of meetings going through managed channels across the organization. This can often be a challenge for organizations that have fragmented business structures or non-mandated programs. Despite this, there are many effective changes to management strategies that can be adopted.

Evolving approach to outsourcing



Focus on curbing commodity spending

In an effort to contain costs, professional services companies are looking to curb commodity spending. For example, by introducing attendee food and beverage spend caps or limiting the recommended meeting duration of internal meetings.

Top performing areas

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Strategy, resource model, strategic sourcing.

Development areas

Technology, engagement & measurement, reporting.

"Hybrid meetings will likely gain traction and be more popular. We are supporting our clients with a methodology and strategy that allows us to provide meeting registration, consultation, recommendation, logistics support, post program reporting and data analytics for virtual event similarly to how we support clients with their (SMMPs). With respect to what may be unique to life sciences at this time-the industry is both at the forefront of managing the current urgency to deliver necessary healthcare, and supporting and developing what will help to arrest and diminish this type of outbreak in the future. We need to be sensitive to both practitioners that are consumed with supporting the healthcare efforts, and those who have also seen their practices paused." Melissa Nahama, Sr. Director, Account Management – LSCOE, BCD M&E

"Customers are moving all face to-face meetings to 2021, but are looking at how to bring in virtual meeting technology to influence the shape of how a meeting will run and what will be the face of these meetings with delegate engagement."

Darim Mohammed, Global Account Director, BCD M&E

"The financial services industry, much like other industries, is seeing a tremendous amount of turmoil. Across the board, conversations surrounding virtual meetings are happening at a feverish pace with companies taking a case by case approach, first looking to determine if a meeting is truly business critical, and revisiting the objectives of a meeting. If the meeting objectives can truly be achieved in a virtual environment, companies currently seem to be taking the path of least resistance and utilizing existing internal tech solutions which have already been vetted by their IT and security teams. Every company needs to really revisit the program objectives along with attendee type and ROI goals." Marc Burillo, Account Director, BCD M&E "For some of our professional services clients, we're seeing a shift from global governance to local and regional office policy. Firms are pivoting towards flexible M&E policy to quickly adjust to the state of the local market. While the past few years have been spent trying to consolidate under global governance, we're seeing local leaders receive the autonomy to conduct business as appropriate for their area. Programs in this space can best position their programs for the future by preparing for agile policies. They can have a robust stakeholder communication plan prepared so everyone can be informed as governance is adjusted." Christina DeHaven, Global Account Director, BCD M&E



VARIATION BY REGION

It is widely understood by companies that in order to drive their meetings management programs, expanding the program globally is expected and encouraged. However, the expectation that the same framework can be "lifted and shifted" across regions is often unrealistic. This is due to several factors, such as:

- Programs not being adapted to suit the local market
- Different buying culture and needs
- Variation in technology usage and adoption rates
- Longstanding local supplier relationships
- Different commercial models and/or complex program funding
- Different approach to service models
- Disconnect from corporate mandates
- Lack of local leadership or support for program
- Lack of stakeholder engagement and/or change management effort
- Unknown meeting stakeholder group(s)

In order to truly globalize a meetings management program, an understanding of regional nuances and subsequent program adaptions in order to drive adoption are needed. See below for insights from our regional leaders on the best approaches in order to effectively globalize a meetings program.

"LATAM is in the early stages of adoption for meetings management programs and in most cases driven by a company's global HQs and the need to have visibility into spend and data collection. Lately, due to the constant economic crisis in most markets, companies are starting to look for ways to incorporate or adhere to their global program already in place. Also, given the reputation in Latin America of corruption, a global program gives companies the opportunity to use this platform to report and be compliant with official and internal authorities.

The best way to incorporate meetings management programs is by applying the "glo-cal" approach (global-local) which means sticking to the global requirements without losing sight of the needs and nuances by market. For example: payment and tax regulations, labor restrictions, cost of living and also the possibility of phasing the program to allow a ramp up where everybody feels comfortable and is key to the success of the program (change management)."

Ana-Paula Hernandez, Vice President LATAM, BCD M&E

"The maturity of SMMPs are typically either individual or consolidated, with the life sciences industry leading the way. Approximately 20% of SMMPs are truly strategic and there is a huge development opportunity in the region. We expect this area to grow in the aftermath of COVID-19. The best ways to adapt global programs locally is through a) effective change management - giving local stakeholders a voice and including them early is important, otherwise there is a substantial risk of program backfire when implemented and b) having a global and regional mindset and framework but with local understanding and adaptation for each country. In EMEA there is almost never a "one-sizefits-all" solution due to language, cultures and labor laws." **Mikael Ek, Managing Director EMEA, BCD M&E**

What makes a global program work?

A truly global program has some key characteristics that contribute to its success. These include:

One central program owner—having one program owner globally who is empowered to make decisions and can influence strategy and business planning.

Business case — ensuring that the program business case encompasses global, regional and local requirements.

Program design—incorporating factors such as ease of use, scalability, control mechanisms, policy development and regional application into the design of the program from the onset.

Technology—having a technology strategy that is clearly communicated and takes into consideration regional application.

Governance structure—having a well-established and connected governance structure in place that includes regional and in-market support and input.

Key stakeholder group connections—having a strong connection with key stakeholder groups across the organization to help drive adoption. This may include finance for managing payments, legal and procurement for contracting oversight and security for duty of care initiatives and visibility.

Change management—the final and most often overlooked critical component is developing an effective change management strategy to communicate, educate, encourage and change behaviors across stakeholders.

SECTION 3: WHAT'S NEXT?

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What will meetings programs look like post COVID-19?

As the situation continues to unfold, the longer-term effects of the current COVID-19 pandemic will come more clearly into view. Planning for both the re-emergence of live meetings as well as the more permanent effects is well under way within many organizations. Key features of this new era within the industry include:

Reaffirming the importance of having a meetings program – it can sometimes take a situation such as a global pandemic to highlight the critical importance of having a meetings program in place. "During crises, organizations need instant responsiveness, full visibility into meetings activity, strong supply chain relationships and access to attendees and their location information to minimize exposure to both their people and their bottom line. An unmanaged program provides none of this⁴." A partially or fully unmanaged program leaves many gaps and questions, and not only creates manual work to collate, but leaves room for error and can create trust erosion by leadership.

Virtual meetings are here to stay – the industry has been predicting the rise of virtual meetings for a number of years, but robust virtual strategies have not been implemented in most organizations. The effect of COVID-19 and the sudden halt on all live meetings and events for a significant period of time has forced organizations to assess their ability to transition meetings and events to a virtual environment, with suppliers pivoting in their approach to be able to facilitate this shift and ensure business continuity. Organizations are starting to look at their overall virtual meeting strategy to assess the suitability of a virtual or hybrid meeting format to their meeting types. This will not replace the need for live meetings but serve to provide alternative formats and clear direction to conducting meetings when travel is not justified or possible. Longer term, this will also support in showing the value a meetings program can bring to an organization's sustainability goals and initiatives.

Sourcing and planning process changes – as live and hybrid meetings start to re-emerge, considerations will need to be made to both the sourcing and planning process. Examples include pre-sourcing attendee number qualification steps, planning a meeting where social distancing needs to be in effect, providing self-care recommendations for attendees, engaging not only a suitable live environment but also virtual access for hybrid meetings, serving food and beverage in a considerate manner and mask provisions.

A changing supplier landscape – the supplier landscape will most certainly look different as the meetings and events industry emerges after COVID-19. An assessment of your suppliers, their solvency and ability to maintain services should be reviewed. The COVID-19 pandemic will have clearly demonstrated to an organization who their strong partners are and will provide an opportunity to reassess their preferred supply chain based on the impact and actions of key partners during this time. The supplier / buyer relationship will most certainly evolve within this changing landscape as the industry finds its feet again. Companies and suppliers will be working to review contract terms in order to create a tighter solution that protects both parties moving forward.

What can organizations learn from the COVID-19 pandemic?

With such a significant disruption to operations when it comes to meetings and events, the ability to press pause, reevaluate on an organization's meetings program and adjust course will be critical to the long-term success of a company's program. Some considerations for organizations with both an existing program or no program currently in place are:

- How well did we react and what do we need to change with our program? Reviewing the speed and success of your reaction to the pandemic, the support you received from your suppliers and any gaps in process of your program should be objectively considered. This question can be applied to organizations with both an existing program or none in place.
- How much did this cost us? Reviewing how much the pandemic cost in terms of cancellation costs and whether this was effectively managed through leveraging strategic sourcing practices or identifying the risk of not having a strategic sourcing program in place.
- How will we adjust our meetings strategy? Based on this assessment you may need to make changes to your meetings program both in the short and long term. This may include policy changes, a long-term approach to virtual meetings, assessing how your meetings calendar will evolve, changes to process and supplier usage and expanding the scope of your meetings program, may all be areas to consider. Or if no program is in place, take initial steps to build some controls within your organization such as developing meeting guidelines, meeting registration guidance or establishing a consolidated venue sourcing program.

Expanding a travel program

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Developing a meetings management program is often considered the next phase after the consolidation of a company's travel program. When a travel manager is initially tasked with expanding an established travel program with meetings, the following program touchpoints may be considered as effective channels:

Standalone meetings policy

One of the first steps in creating a meetings management program is creating and communicating a standalone meetings policy or guidelines that sit outside of, or in line with, the existing travel policy. This at least establishes definitions for meetings, defines a process to gain visibility of activity, and any suggested paths or contingencies that should be followed to conduct and execute a meeting within the organization. As an initial step, the guidelines can be fairly condensed, and further detail can be added as the meetings program evolves and gains traction.

Small or simple meetings program

Establish a small/simple meetings program by creating and promoting a process, technology and/or service support in order to get visibility and strategically manage spend within this category. Estimates show that at least half of an organization's activity is for meetings of 50 attendees or less⁵, therefore the potential opportunity for within this category is vast. Change management is a key component of putting such a structure in place, and some strong recommendations when standing up a small or simple meetings program would be to include an expected user group in the design and construct. Adoption rates will thrive when you have "champions" in the business that have a strong connection to what has been implemented.

Venue sourcing consolidation

As an initial step in gaining control of meetings spend, the consolidation of a venue sourcing process can create resource efficiency, gain visibility of activity, mitigate contracting risk and increase cost savings. Venue spend can make up around 60%⁶ of a meeting or event budget, so its important for a company to get their arms around this activity. By utilizing the same supplier for both meetings and travel, there is the opportunity to leverage spend, optimize process and improve attendee/traveler experience.

Group travel management

This includes establishing a process to ensure meetings over a certain scope are registered and assigned a group travel ID. By establishing a process around group travel management, benefits will include – service and attendee experience improvement, enhanced reporting to support the meeting planning and reconciliation processes and duty of care considerations. A recent survey⁷ established that duty of care was the top consideration for travel managers in 2020.

Reporting

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The possible benefits that consolidated reporting across a meeting and travel program may provide your organization should also be considered. If implemented thoughtfully, bringing together data from both programs will provide the opportunity for deeper business insights that will deliver greater program value back to the business.

The future of meetings management programs

As business needs adapt in our ever-changing world, it pays to continually be looking forward, ensuring a meetings program is positioned in a way that is can be adapted across an organization to maintain relevancy and deliver value to a variety of stakeholder groups. Several common themes were identified through a recent survey³ sent to all account managers within BCD M&E globally, that focused on how meetings programs will adapt and change over the next five years.

What's influencing meeting program strategy?

INTERNAL INFLUENCES

In order of level of influence:

- 1. Cost savings initiatives
- 2. Restructuring
- 3. New leadership
- 4. Procurement influence
- 5. Mergers & acquisitions
- 6. Sustainability
- 7. New products
- 8. Organizational growth
- 9. Risk mitigation concerns
- 10. Stakeholder initiative

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

In order of level of influence:

- 1. Global pandemic
- 2. Economy
- 3. Venue availability
- 4. Political unrest
- 5. Advancing technology
- 6. Industry compliance required
- 7. Brexit
- 8. Government regulation
- 9. National elections
- 10. Trade sanctions

What does this mean?

In terms of internal influencing factors, **cost savings** continues to be the key driver for meetings programs with specific focus on curbing spend on internal and on occasion also global meetings. Poor company performance for some organizations lead to budget cuts and restructuring and other cost savings initiatives are being announced. **Leadership changes** can have opposing effects, for some organization's meetings may slow down during a period of transition. For others an influx of meetings may be driven by these types of changes – in both cases a proactive approach to manage changes in volume should be considered. In addition, **merger and acquisition** activity creates complications and initial uncertainty but also opportunities for the meetings program being expanded into the new organization.



Sustainability is becoming an increasing focus for companies as part of their meetings programs. Moving forward this will move into a program-wide initiative rather than focus on individual events, with virtual meetings and event level standards and expectations. A framework to apply sustainable concepts and measurement across a meetings program will continue to grow in importance.

In terms of external influences, **economic uncertainty** for some organizations is causing budgets to be cut and delays in contract signature. However, this also leads to organizations wanting to identify other parts of the business who are having meetings in order to increase visibility of meetings and events and expand the program in order to enhance the program benefits.

With the recent **global health pandemic** of COVID-19 causing significant disruption for the meetings and events industry, strategies from third parties and within organizations to manage against the effects will become increasingly important. These situations require that organizations have immediate response, full visibility into meetings activity, strong supply chain relationships and access to attendees and their location information to minimize exposure. By having either no program or a limited program creates a high level of liability for an organization⁴. In addition, a robust virtual or hybrid meetings solution already in place may serve as an effective contingency if meetings are having forced to be canceled. Prior to the pandemic, **venue availability** had been a continual challenge for organizations, with delayed decision making by stakeholders causing tight turn-around times and availability challenges. As meetings start to take place again, there will be increased competition for space due to the multitude of COVID-19 rebooking that need to be accommodated. Streamlining RFPs and the negotiation process will position organizations more favorably when competing for space.

By understanding the factors that are influencing meetings programs, these elements can be considered when reviewing a future-forward strategy and identifying focus areas for program development.



The globalization of meetings programs will continue to expand, with more regional adaptations being made to drive program adoption Number of face-to-face meetings will be reduced with a stricter criterion enforced to prove meeting validity & robust measurement of meeting effectiveness becoming standard. Hybrid meeting formats will become common place, particularly when face to face meetings start to re-emerge





Cost savings will continue to be a major focus with specific focus on economizing internal meetings and increasingly innovative initiatives



Further focus on the attendee

experience and the digitization of both the attendee experience and the management of the meetings program will occur





Strategies to support virtual and hybrid meetings will become more common place and robust, especially as a proactive response to future global health crises. A digital strategy will become a critical component within the overall meetings management program



References

¹ GBTA Strategic Meetings Management Program Wheel, 2017

³ BCD M&E own data – 2020

⁴ BCD M&E, "Why a meetings management program is crucial during a global crisis", March 2020

⁵ Michael J. Shapiro, NorthStar Meetings Group, "Simplifying the Small Meetings Booking Process", February 2020
⁶ BCD M&E own data – 2020

⁷ BCD Travel Research & Innovation Report, "Travel Bite: Travel program priorities", March 2020

Methodology

² BCD M&E surveyed account managers across 41 meetings management accounts. This included a cross section of industry verticals.



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