



MEETINGS OUTLOOK™



While the overall business outlook appears soft, event professionals continue to butt heads with cost increases, funding cuts, reduced international attendance and even outright event cancellation.

2025 Q3 EDITION



Economic, geopolitical challenges task event pros



By Elaine Pofeldt

Rhonda James is staying nimble as founder and CEO of e218 Events Management, a Bronx, N.Y.-based producer of live events such as the Bronx Ball and the Bronx Fireworks Extravaganza.

Her firm works mostly with nonprofit clients, and with their sponsorships down, she finds they are slower to commit and more cautious about spending money.

"We did a big event that was pretty much sponsor-driven in May, and the original plan was 600 guests," she said. "I got a call about maybe six weeks out that we needed to cut it down, in half, which we did...but as the time came closer and closer, we increased it back up completely, to close to 600."

James has plenty of company among meeting professionals. For the second quarter in a row, the industry

is coping with one of weakest business prospects in the history of MPI's Meetings Outlook survey.

Currently, just 47% of respondents anticipate favorable conditions in the year ahead, according to the Q3 Meetings Outlook survey. This is up from last quarter (31%) but still well below what had become the new normal (68%-78%).

Although people aren't exactly staying home—favorable live attendance projections have risen to 47% vs. 36% last quarter—anticipated in-person attendance is still well below the 70%-76% "favorable" the industry has become accustomed to seeing. Meanwhile, virtual/digital attendance projections are steady quarter over quarter, after growing notably in Q2.

One planner at a U.S.-based corporation shared anonymously that they're moving to virtual for most

“It is nearly impossible to find properties that will accommodate peak night patterns unless they can match other groups within the same time frame.”

ELIZABETH KRETCHMER, CMM, CMP, HMCC, DES

MPI Rocky Mountain Chapter

events that were to be held at its U.S. headquarters, and the company is also moving some trainings to an international location its branch employees “feel comfortable traveling to.”

Budget projections continue to track similarly as projections for live attendance and overall business conditions with favorable expectations rising quarter over quarter (47% vs. 36%), after a year during which this data point remained between 66% and 72%.

Cost-cutting means survival

In the current environment, many event professionals are facing cost increases—the most significant trend cited.

“It has become increasingly difficult to source meetings with hotels’ sales expectations and coupling of groups,” Elizabeth Kretchmer, CMM, CMP, HMCC, DES (MPI Rocky Mountain Chapter), a planner, said in

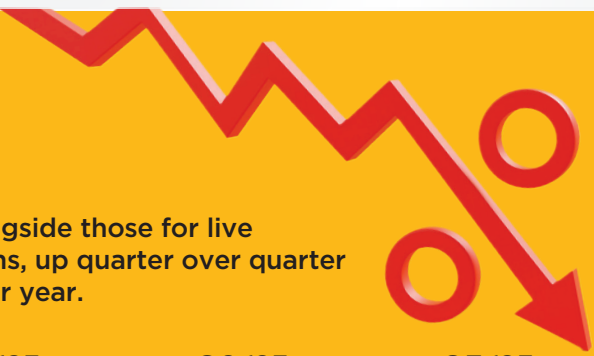
her survey response. “It is nearly impossible to find properties that will accommodate peak night patterns unless they can match other groups within the same time frame. It is difficult to secure meeting space, and we have had to make significant compromises with our program needs in order to place programs. It has become a very frustrating exercise.”

Some respondents note experiencing hotels enforcing contracts more strictly and are now taking a proactive approach at the point of registration to protect event ROI. Among them is Sara Connell, founder of The Thought Leader Academy, which helps clients build a platform around their ideas through writing and speaking. Her company runs four events annually, with the next one—Women Starting Movements, a three-day event for experts, coaches and entrepreneurs—slated for Oct. 7-9 in New York City.

Connell went through a nail-biter when a large

BUDGET PROJECTIONS

Budget projections continue to track alongside those for live attendance and overall business conditions, up quarter over quarter (47% vs. 36%) but down notably year over year.



	Q4 '24	Q1 '25	Q2 '25	Q3 '25
Favorable	71%	66%	36%	47%
Flat	21%	21%	23%	23%
Negative	8%	14%	40%	30%

“I have stopped holding events at hotels and have started to look at alternative venue spaces. I can’t afford the F&B costs and service fees.”

CHRISTINA READ, CMP

MPI Greater New York Chapter

hotel enacted a contractual clause that added \$100,000 in costs to a 90-person event. A group of attendees surprised her by opting for Airbnbs instead of the high-end hotel, unexpectedly leaving part of the room block empty.

“Everyone [previously] always wanted to stay on property,” she recalls. “We never had any indication that wasn’t going to happen.”

That experience prompted her to change her policy on registrations.

“We now do contracts and interest forms for every event, meaning if someone wants to come to New York City to our Women Starting Movements event, we actually have a contract that they agree to pay for their ticket, and it’s not refundable if there’s a room block,” Connell says. “Since then, we have run events where we’re profitable before we get into the room, every single time.”

The New York State Tourism Advisory Council is taking a similar approach, according to board member

Olga Luz Tirado, a publicist and marketer based in Beacon, N.Y., who often relies on Rhonda James to produce events. Given the high cost of food and beverage, the organization is now setting deadlines for cancellations if its conference attendees can’t make it and seek a refund.

“We’ve already pre-paid for the food and that money is lost [if they] don’t show up,” says Tirado, former executive director of the Bronx Tourism Council.

Due to cost increases, more than two-thirds of planners are trimming their spending on entertainment (72%), promotional products (70%) and F&B (69%). In fact, one-in-five (20%) planners labeled cuts to event entertainment budgets as “major.”

“F&B and AV pricing is out of control,” said Christina Read, CMP (MPI Greater New York Chapter), senior director of events and conferences at a global nonprofit, in her survey response. “I have stopped holding events at hotels and have started to look at alternative venue spaces. I can’t afford the F&B costs and service fees.”

BUSINESS CONDITIONS

Business condition projections remain among the weakest seen in Meetings Outlook as only 47% of respondents anticipate favorable conditions in the year ahead. This is up from last quarter (31%) but still well below what had become the new normal (68%-78%).

	Q4 '24	Q1 '25	Q2 '25	Q3 '25
Favorable	78%	71%	31%	47%
Neutral	13%	18%	12%	14%
Negative	9%	10%	57%	43%

It's not only planners who are making cuts; 61% of suppliers have trimmed their promotional products spending, followed by entertainment (with 57% of supplier respondents making cuts) and F&B (with 54% cutting back on these costs).

Though both planners and suppliers are targeting similar areas for cost-cutting, a higher percentage of suppliers cited promotional products and entertainment as areas seeing *major* cuts (19% and 22%, respectively).

More than one-third of all event professionals surveyed say spending cuts are having a “significant” or “moderate” impact on the overall attendee/event experience. However, most event professionals say these spending cuts are having little to no impact on the overall attendee/event experience. That said, they reported a slightly worse impact on the *stakeholder* experience, with 41% reporting a “significant” or “moderate” impact.

GOVERNMENTAL IMPACTS

Most meeting and event professionals are experiencing negative impacts from recent U.S. executive orders and policy changes—and the extent of those impacts is significant.

Are recent U.S. executive orders and/or government policy changes impacting your organization or business, either positively or negatively?

	Q2 '25	Q3 '25
Yes, both positive and negative impacts	13%	22%
Yes, only positive impacts	1%	1%
Yes, only negative impacts	62%	48%
No	9%	11%
Unsure	15%	18%

Those experiencing negative impacts report a variety of ways in which they're being affected.



Meeting professionals are taking a proactive approach to reducing that impact. James maintains the quality of events through strong relationships with suppliers. In May, she produced a 100-person event at which one supplier agreed to charging the same as last year, even though his costs had gone up.

“I think that is based on the relationship and business exposure he knows he is going to get,” James said. “Those types of relationships take a minute to build, and I’m fortunately blessed to have the types of vendors who recognize the value and try to work with us to cut costs where they can.”

Others are finding tech-based solutions.

“Clients continue to want more for lower spend and the challenge is maintaining and improving guest experience with reducing budgets,” said a planner from Australia, who requested anonymity, in the survey responses.

The solution has been creativity.

“Our approach has been to get better at integrating technology in event design from the outset and asking the question, ‘What can we do if not everyone has to

be in the same place at the same time?’” the planner said. “The challenges then become designing solutions that increase guest numbers, still delivering outcomes and getting the clients to accept this nontraditional approach. One way we’re doing this is by making the online events more like live and interactive TV shows, giving participants more reasons to engage with the content.”

Adjusting to new U.S. policies

At the same time, most event professionals continue to experience significant negative impacts due to recent U.S. executive orders and policy changes, with the majority (70%) reporting negative impacts.

Again, the data shows that most respondents (59%) citing negative impacts are encountering cost increases. Forty-nine percent reported a decline in international attendees, 43% experienced event cancellations and nearly one-third reported reduced domestic attendance. Additionally, 32% of this cohort have already experienced a partial loss of event funding and nearly one-fifth have experienced a complete

ATTENDANCE FORECASTS

Similar to business condition projections, the percentage of respondents anticipating favorable live attendance is up over last quarter (47% vs. 36%), while still well below what we’ve become accustomed to seeing (70%-76%). Meanwhile, virtual/digital attendance projections are steady quarter over quarter, after growing notably in Q2.

Projected Live Attendance

	Q4 ‘24	Q1 ‘25	Q2 ‘25	Q3 ‘25
Positive	75%	76%	36%	47%
Flat	16%	12%	16%	19%
Negative	9%	12%	48%	35%

Projected Virtual Attendance

	Q4 ‘24	Q1 ‘25	Q2 ‘25	Q3 ‘25
Positive	22%	18%	32%	31%
Flat	39%	35%	38%	36%
Negative	38%	47%	30%	32%

“[It’s] too expensive and too stressful to travel to the U.S.”

RICCARDA GALIOTO

MPI Ottawa Chapter

loss of event funding.

Riccarda Galioto (MPI Ottawa Chapter), executive director of the Association of Medical Microbiology and Infectious Disease in Ottawa, Ontario, is both planning and attending more events in Canada in the current climate, saying in her survey response it’s “too expensive and too stressful to travel to the U.S.” Meanwhile, her organization is starting to develop a town hall member webinar series to encourage scientific solidarity with American counterparts.

At the same time, few respondents report positive impacts from these executive orders and policy changes—and the extent of those impacts is minor or negligible. Against this backdrop, some meeting professionals find few options.

Karen Kuzsel (MPI Greater Orlando Chapter), owner of The Psychic Lady, has been experiencing cancelled events, reduced international attendance, reduced domestic attendance, a slowdown in future bookings, postponed events and a shorter duration for events, according to her survey response. Her solution? “Focusing on other areas of my life and visualizing policies change, though I don’t really ‘see’ that happening anytime soon.”

Tirado finds herself looking hard at the ROI from events as tariffs introduce uncertainty to pricing from event suppliers. When she prepared to bid on a recent 1,000-person event for minority and women business owners, she found that the supplier with

the lowest prices for badges, registration technology and apps was based in Canada. However, with tariffs on the table, Tirado wasn’t certain what the final cost would be.

“When we sat down and started crunching the numbers, I said, ‘I don’t know if I can make this happen for that budget,’” she says.

Growth in full-time hiring also continues trending down at a time U.S. hiring is slowing dramatically, with only 18% of respondents indicating an increase in these roles. Part-time and contract hiring are both up slightly quarter over quarter.

“The current U.S. administration does not understand the value of our industry and is making decisions that adversely impact us,” one anonymous supplier shared in their survey responses. “The loss in revenue is causing us to cut expenses, question all new hires, reduce contract labor and remove bonuses/incentives.”

That trend, in turn, is putting pressure on both suppliers and planners alike.

“AV companies have had [staffing] issues so we’re seeing many young recruits who are very green,” the planner said in the survey comments. “It takes more of our time onsite as planners/producers to make sure they are doing their job effectively.”

Ultimately, those types of on-the-fly solutions may be the best available in the current business environment.



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