

Government Support Must Be Earned

BY GEOFF DONAGHY – AIPC PRESIDENT

⇒ **Whether or not we like it**, or even think much about it, most of us in the Meetings Industry are heavily dependent on government support.

Government investments fund the development of major facilities in most parts of the world. Government policies determine to a large extent attendance and participation at many events. And government immigration, trade and access decisions heavily influence the conditions that either facilitate or obstruct the global exchanges we represent.

So it's important that governments – and the communities they represent – see the value in what we do. And that value must be in terms that matter to them, not just us, if we are to

enjoy ongoing support.

That's why it's become increasingly important to ensure our industry is seen not just as a source of visitor revenues but a major contributor to key areas like global economic, academic and professional development that contribute in a direct and significant way to a wide range of government policy objectives. The challenge to governments – who remain the major investor in this area due to their typical role as owner / operators of the major convention facilities that make this all possible - is how to measure the return on their investment in as realistic a way as possible.

This is not as easy as it sounds – because the kind of narrow value definition ap-

plied for so many years doesn't even begin to capture the real range of benefits we deliver. It's time for a more realistic approach because investment decisions need to be made on the basis of measures that address the full spectrum of benefits rather than simply those related to visitor spending.

So what do we say to governments about our role and value? The starting point is a realization that the myriad of organizations and associations that count meetings, conventions and exhibitions amongst their key organizational responsibilities do so because of what they achieve in terms of business, professional and organizational advancement – and this is where the greatest benefits lie for governments and communities as well.

This means that beyond the “tourism effect” - and the associated incremental jobs and derived tax revenues it generates for governments – there is what might best be called event outputs – those business, professional and academic advancements that result from meetings and events and include not only such economic rewards as inward investment, talent attraction, knowledge transfer and innovation / creation that directly support economic policies but also impact many other areas of government policy and responsibility

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like health care, education and employment readiness.

Once governments realize the breadth of these impacts on their own policy priorities they start to understand why this is an industry in which they need to support and invest. The broader values we deliver are never going to be easy to measure with precision - but they still need to be taken into account in order to support good investment decisions, particularly with public money. This is our job – and our responsibility - as an industry and it's long overdue. [©]

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