

IMEX Policy Forum 2022

What does success look like?



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Highlights from the IMEX Policy Forum

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I. Objectives of the Forum

The aim of this year's Policy Forum was to help set the agenda for future high-level discussions and conversations to help build better partnerships and understanding between policy makers and our wider business events industry.

A total of 35 political representatives and policy makers from national and regional government organisations from more than 19 countries were among 140 participants.

Natasha Richards, Head of Advocacy & Industry Relations, IMEX Group

Over the past two tumultuous years, nations and cities have faced an unprecedented period of extreme disruption, radical uncertainty, and hyper-accelerated change. National priorities have, understandably, been to keep citizens safe and prevent economic collapse. At the same time, every sector of the international business events industry was decimated.

However, this has also been a period of great innovation and profound inward reflection. "Purpose" has been a common denominator.

Key questions: What value can meetings truly deliver? In healthcare outcomes, scientific progress in Business and Economic Development? How can our industry better serve the interests of all citizens in the destinations

that host events? What new skills and success metrics are necessary for our industry? How can we reinvent the industry? How can we be part of sustainability solutions rather than part of the problem? And critically, how can policy makers and business events professionals identify their common interests, collaborate more effectively, and increase the positive societal and local impacts of the events that they host?

II. Provocation Panel # 1 - Today's biggest challenges & solutions



Moderator:

Jane Cunningham, Director of European Engagement, Destinations International

Panellists:

Kit Lykketoft, Director of Convention, Wonderful Copenhagen

Aileen Crawford, Head of Tourism & Conventions, Glasgow Convention Bureau, Glasgow Life

Dr Edward Koh, Executive Director, Singapore Convention Bureau

Challenges and solutions: Key points

A re-evaluation of the role, purpose and value of business events has taken place post-pandemic, and the values and motivations of delegates has shifted.

Kit Lykketoft, Director of Convention, Wonderful Copenhagen, opened the discussion by talking about one of the biggest challenges to emerge post-pandemic.

Lykketoft said: "The experience of face-to-face meetings needs to match the sum of your efforts.

"We are on a journey of profound change in this industry. The time equation has changed and it's much more complex than it was before. What will make people attend business events?"

"In the new equation, the effort that you put in is so much bigger than it was before. It will be cost x time, x carbon footprint, x risk of health and safety – and all that needs to be less than the value of the experience.

"And, the experience, we have learned, needs to equal personal values, a deep sense of meaning and a deep sense of place that will make people go – that's a challenge."

Collaboration between all key stakeholders is key to recovery

The Singapore Convention Bureau worked closely with government and industry stakeholders to develop the destination's recovery roadmap. This included a series of pilot events, a document called the Safe Response Framework, and the introduction of safe events standards.

"This helped to guide the industry and build trust – and when there's trust a lot of things can be achieved faster," said Dr Edward Koh, Executive Director, Singapore Convention Bureau.

Traditionally, business events have been misunderstood – now is an opportunity to reflect, innovate and better align events with policy

Aileen Crawford, Head of Tourism & Conventions, Glasgow Convention Bureau, Glasgow Life talked about how traditionally business events haven't been appreciated or understood. There is a sense that this may have shifted during the pandemic and there is now an opportunity to reflect and innovate.

Crawford said: "We have the chance to collaborate to make sure that we are not misunderstood. How can we align business events with policy? With business events, we're there to make other people look good. So how do we make the business events industry look good?"

Wider unprecedented challenges cited during the session included - the effects of the pandemic, war, climate change, threat of recession.

III. Summary of roundtable discussions & feedback



Participants were presented with three talking points to discuss on their tables. There was then an opportunity to feedback to the key points to the room.

The three questions were:

1. **Profit, people, and planet - is it a difficult balance?**
2. **What needs to change to create experiences that elevate the value of in-person meetings?**
3. **Share positive opportunities that have been created over the past couple of years**

Profit, people, and planet - is it a difficult balance?

The sense in the room was that is it a difficult balance, but the answer starts with policy, and measurement and being able to demonstrate value.

Point 1: Policy is paramount

Policy is the most important ingredient when it comes to profit, people, and planet – nothing can work unless there's a top-down approach, especially with sustainability. It is not a top priority for the events industry. It's been taken as a CSR activity for a long time, but we need to make sure it is incentivized.

Point 2: Measuring values is a core starting point

Guy Bigwood, Managing Director and Chief Changemaker, Global Destination Sustainability Movement (GDS-Movement), referred to the difficult balance. He said: "On one side, we've got this amazing rush to get back to events, while on the other side we have a goal to get to zero carbon emissions by 2050. It is a wicked problem of

finding that balance between the two. So how do we start to define this and how do we start to look at how we're measuring the value of what we're doing? How do we justify the value because we have to not only justify it to our communities, but to our staff, clients, families? COVID has taught us that the impossible doesn't exist. And in fact, it's only the impossible that is interesting. So, we have a possible reality."

What needs to change to create experiences that elevate the value of in-person meetings?

Answers included: marketing needs to change to highlight the value for delegates, new methodology, and better storytelling.

Point 1: Marketing shift for delegates

Lyn Lewis-Smith, Chief Executive Officer of BESydney, said: "Destinations need to dial up the value proposition for the delegate. With the growth in remote working, how do you convince someone to travel to events? Destination marketing needs to be repositioned.

Point 2: A new methodology

Event owners need to collect data and research on delegates in terms of understanding everything from the new knowledge, tools and techniques that are taken back to the workplace, and the global collaboration that comes from networking. There is an opportunity for a new methodology to be developed around these things.

Point 3: Storytelling

The industry needs to be better at communicating our stories, successes, and achievements to local and national governments.

Share positive opportunities that have been created over the past couple of years

Point 1: The disappearance of business events made it visible

Covid has created a better understanding of the value of the business events industry. Its disappearance made it visible. There is now much greater awareness among governments and community leaders of the positive impact that business events have on their destinations, particularly in terms of its financial impact and job creation, etc.

Point 2: Events help to drive every industry forward.

As the meetings industry serves and supports every industry, it now has a vital role to restart every other sector as business events get restarted.

Point 3: Digital communication increased

Digital communication behaviours increased during the pandemic - everyone is much more comfortable using technology to communicate now.

IV. Provocation Panel # 2 - Future priorities for alignment



Moderator:

Jane Cunningham, Director of European Engagement, Destinations International

Panellists:

Michelle Mason, President & CEO, ASAE

Hon. Bruce Baird, BESydney Board Chairman, Former NSW Minister for Transport and Sydney Olympic Bid

Kai Hattendorf, CEO, UFI

Future priorities for alignment

Key themes that emerged:

- Collaboration
- Speaking with 'One Voice' to government
- University research
- Storytelling and sharing successes
- Experimenting and testing
- Next Generation

Collaboration

Hon. Bruce Baird gave examples of the collaboration between BESydney and policy makers.

Collaboration came up again as a fundamental way to align business events with policy. Bruce Baird described how industry stakeholders used to operate independently, but this has been transformed and now there is "total involvement" from the government in Sydney. "The government is very much involved in what we do day to day. BESydney has made sure the government is held responsible for how they are funded and what they do."

Baird also touched upon the importance of storytelling. He said: "We share achievements. When we deliver a major event, it is not BESydney that announces it, the minister does. The minister talks to the media about what it means to the destination. So, they're involved."

Speaking with "One voice"

Bringing together key stakeholders from the airlines, the hotels, the tour operators, etc. provides the chance to speak with "one voice" to government. Baird said: "We work together in terms of strategizing. our spokesperson is speaking on behalf of the industry nearly every day, speaking to governments about our issues, and that tends to work very well."

On the subject of 'One Voice', Kai Hattendorf said the industry "has found its voice". "We have a manifesto. For the first time we have a narrative that explains who we are as an industry, and we have 15 ways that business events can prove to policy makers how we drive things forward. We must all take this 'hymn sheet' with us to talk with one voice."

University research

Baird also mentioned the importance of university research to support the industry. He said: "The economics minister also understands very well the economic impact when you don't have business events - there is a drop in terms of employment for example. There needs to be data on these things. We have universities doing research on these issues, which is very important."

A time for experimentation and testing, and being comfortable with failures

Michelle Mason, President & CEO, ASAE said that for their members, "now is a time for experimentation and testing, sharing our successes and being comfortable with the failures. There is no one right answer."

Next generation

Michelle Mason also highlighted the importance of the next generation to be involved in the decision-making process. She said: "The tent needs to be bigger - the next generation needs to be invited to sit at the table. Their voices need to be heard and understood. It is about inviting non-traditional players to the table too."

V. Summary of round table discussions & feedback

Participants were presented with three talking points to discuss on their tables. There was then an opportunity to feedback to the key points to the room.

The three key talking points were:

- 1. What is the role of business events in your destination strategy?**
- 2. How can a collaborative ecosystem drive success?**
- 3. What is your role in engaging future leaders for success?**

What is the role of business events in your destination strategy?

It varies by country, and even city.

The role business events play, and the strategies needed, differ greatly by country, and even by city. One destination said that their government had largely abandoned tourism strategy. The destinations have had to pick that up and do it on a local level and have been working with the private sector to drive strategies and initiatives.



Some examples from Africa:

Uganda and Ethiopia have developed meeting groups to train and educate ministers on business events.

An example was given where a destination is using their parliament, which is an event venue, to host an exhibition for the MICE industry. This is an effective way to educate policy makers.

In Ethiopia, there has been a restructure of tourism. Business events are now aligned with the economy and MICE has been integrated into its strategy for the first time. Building infrastructure is key so it is important for an integrated strategy to secure funding. There is also an opportunity now to build the regions and non-capital cities by using that influx.

It's important for destinations to understand their "sphere of influence"

Sheriff Karamat, CEO of PCMA, said that the discussion highlighted that every destination must understand their role of influence or the people that influence a destination because destination leaders are not necessarily the best influencers. He said: "Understand your sphere of influence and who can help you integrate the strategy for your destination."

How can a collaborative ecosystem drive success?

Reverse discussions with governments

When trying to align business events with policy priorities – reverse the discussion with governments. Understand what their policy priorities are, and then try to align the business events priorities with those policies.

Destinations must take a long-term approach and view - "Invest towards economic development for the whole country"

Karamat cited an example from Rwanda where the national airline was "a money loser, but an investment towards economic development for the whole country because access was a problem. Sometimes, having a loss leader in one sector is important to help other sectors drive betterment for all."

Collaboration at board level

An example was shared from Australia. The tourism body for New South Wales has a presence on the board for BESydney, so there's a "direct conduit, a direct input back and forth, and also direct access to the treasurer and this has really elevated the strategic focus of business events in the destination and all of New South Wales and completely rewritten the narrative of that destination."

Collaborative ecosystems should be fluid

One of the speakers said: "We talked about community building and working with communities and collaborative ecosystems and what they do – and they do a lot. But do not think of them as closed systems, but as value-driven, topic-driven, storytelling-driven and value sharing systems. These systems are fluid, and this is very important. They must be open to change."

Harness the power and size of the events industry

James Morgan, from International Tourism and Hospitality College, Riyadh, reported back that there has been “patchy governance of the business events industry over the past few years, but the sector has the power to change that in the minds of policy makers. If we think about all the people in this room and all the events that our taking place, we have tens of millions of people under our umbrella that can all be influencers of change. We can start with simple messaging to delegates, like the **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs), and then taking those messages further to drive real success. We need to use the industry to put people first and then profit will come from that.”

Collaboration with government is critical in addressing to workforce development and the complexities of the current state of the market

One of the speakers said that workforce development (in hotels, venues, airports etc.) is going to be critical to ensure that the promise of a meeting or event can be delivered. If delegates have less than a perfect experience, there is an excuse not to attend again. The speaker also added that the record level of demand happening in the leisure travel sector now, it is challenging for business events to get the space and rooms needed. These are two complex issues and the more collaboration we can have with government, the more success we can have.

What is your role in engaging future leaders for success?

One of the speakers said: “In terms of the future leaders of our industry, we don't have the representation that we need at an academic level and at the linguistic level – perhaps business events may not be the right phrase. We need to engage academia and get better representation when we're working with younger people. We need to reflect the work life balance in our own industry to attract talent in because we'll work hard and we're familiar with doing that, but younger generations aren't interested. It's about investing in the future of the industry because we are not attracting talent now.”

VI. Prof. Greg Clark reflections & “big ideas”

It's not just a recovery, it's a kind of Renaissance.

Everybody knows that pandemic was a major health crisis, and it was an economic shock, but it was an accelerator of change.

It abolished face to face activity for two years, it relocated face to place activity, so that it had to happen in your home, in your garden, in your apartment, or somewhere else. And it really accelerated what we might call face to space activity in all the Zooming and the Teams meetings. It completely disrupted the patterns that we had established. And so now, what's interesting here, it's not just a recovery, it's a kind of Renaissance.



There are big prizes here, for people who want to be the champions of this industry, because there is an opportunity to completely reinvent and to do away with some old problems that have gone away.

The pandemic has created the environment in which we can completely reinvent the industry.

You made me think of five songs...

🎵 **Song 1: The Rolling Stones: I can't get no satisfaction**

The diminishing returns of virtual working and the fruits of face to face – the only way to get satisfaction is that way.

A new clear story has emerged: business events are the only way to reach recovery, and the policy makers are now listening

Business events are not just part of the recovery of the nations of the cities, but they're the only way now that you can engage international talent, capital, innovation, technology, leadership – with a place-based strategy – is the only way to do it because you've got to reinvent it.

But it's the story now for which the ears are ready – that's the big difference.

🎵 **Song 2: We are the champions by Queen.**

It's obvious, wasn't it that people in the room were talking about that?

🎵 **Song 3:** And I also thought that **Joni Mitchell** should come into play here. **You don't know what you've got till it's gone.** I heard almost everybody say in one way or another. We had business events. We've had congresses with ventures for years and years. Suddenly, we realised what we had because it's gone. And we realise how precious it is whether it's the billions of dollars of tax revenue, whether it's the jobs, whether it's how it supports the amenities and the infrastructure, whether it's the consumer basic brings for all kinds of things.

Key takeaway: It's very clear that this is core economy – not a nice to have.

Academic worlds colliding

There is an academic world that talks about the visitor economy, and another academic world that talks about the innovation economy, and usually these two academic worlds don't come together. But...

the role of business meetings and events and congresses has shifted from being a subset of the topic about tourism to being right in the heart of the conversation about the innovation economy.

So, when we talk about the innovation economy, we talk about the ability to rapidly commercialise agile ideas and technologies using place-based capital institutions, the fabric the workforce, mobile capital talent, capital ideas, intellectual property. And what's happened really is that we've just repositioned business events from being a subset of tourism to being at the core of what the innovation economy is all about.

Key takeaway: If you're looking for academics to write about this, it's your economic geographers. And your innovation economists that you want to be writing about this not your tourism academics.

Measurement

The broader impact of the industry takes a long time. It's notoriously difficult to measure because what you're measuring is the productivity of your ecosystems. You're not measuring the minute impacts of one event. You need to use a good tracking system to measure over a 2, 3, 4-year period. You can measure how events enrich your ecosystems through amounts of capital invested, number of IPs listed, the range and the breadth of the jobs that are created. And of course, ultimately, you can measure tax revenues as well. But you're measuring it at ecosystem level, not at the level of one event, one firm, one sector, one industry.

🎵 **Song 4: Frank Sinatra's New York New York**

The line: if I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere.

This is a song about New Yorkers, but what it's really all about is the accelerating effect of a place if you go to a place that requires you to be your best because it puts you against the best in the world. So, you compete with the best in the world. And by competing with the best in the world. You become the best version of yourself that you can be. If you can make it there you can then make it anywhere. The role of events is to be the accelerator of that contest between talent to be the best that you can be and so eventually become an accelerator in a system and Frank Sinatra knew that I don't know why we didn't know.

🎵 **Song 5: Dolly Parton - This isn't a song, but a quote from Dolly.**

She was asked, what's the secret of your success?

She said: figure out what you're good at and do it on purpose.

The same thing applies to cities – Understand your DNA. Be clear about what your genetic makeup is. Leverage that, express that, articulate that.

The same is true for business events. Figure out what you're good at and do it on purpose.

Dolly Parton has a lesson for all of us here, which is that these business events are right at the fulcrum of sequencing these innovation economies so that exactly the right pool of talent comes together with exactly the right group of visitors on exactly the right agenda with exactly the right technologies and innovations in the room.

Then, that is about figuring out what you're good at and doing on purpose. That's the thing that's going to multiply the value.

Greg's big ideas for the business events industry

Idea 1

Because of the pandemic, there has been a loss of confidence in the idea of human concentration in certain places, particularly city centres.

[City centres or central business districts (CBD), or whatever you want to call it now, we're in the business of reinventing them to become central experience districts or central social districts.]

So, my one big idea is that every business meeting or event that is happening in the next few years should see whether it can be part of the revitalization of downtown – using American language – because that would be the thing that would have the biggest multiplication effect for anyone.

Don't forget in our city centres, we've got massive sunk investments, huge amenities there right at the centre of what makes the city a sharing platform, which is what cities are platforms for sharing things sharing transport system sharing housing markets, sharing like on so city centre events, that's one big idea. Everybody's doing it. Let's do it big and bold and even better.

Idea 2

Every business event that happens in the next few years should commit itself to having at least 10 commercialize-able intellectual property outcomes.

So, you're using business events and laboratories capable of generating a new commercialize-able IP. Every event of this kind should have at least 10% of its attendees being young people from local schools.

And every event of this kind should make a commitment to leave the event destination a better place afterwards than it was before.

VII. Priority issues identified for future research

A key objective for this year's Policy Forum was that the deliberations and interactions between business events industry leaders and senior policy makers should generate valuable new information about our shared priorities in order to help steer the direction of future research projects, such as DestinationNEXT's Futures Study, the next edition of which is scheduled in 2023.

The below list of issues is being shared with all participants in the 2022 Policy Forum to encourage their inclusion in other national and international surveys, in advocacy campaigns, and in national industry/policy maker engagement events and activities. Please let IMEX know when you make use of any of these ideas and issues in your research and advocacy work, along with the findings that are generated, so that we can share this information with the wider Business Events community.

It is also our intention to incorporate some of these issues in the programme for the 2023 IMEX Policy Forum, so that our content continues to reflect the most important priorities facing our sector.

Many thanks for all of your valuable contributions during the 2022 Forum!



★ **Competition for talent & role of future leaders** – multiple dimensions, including:

- Listen/engage/involve – at Policy Forum and more generally in building strategy
- Motivating/educating and training/attracting and retaining
- Role in and links with Diversity/Equity/Inclusion
- Connecting with new generation of delegates (and organisers)
- Lessons from new (mainly online) communities of interest formed during the Pandemic

★ **"Only the impossible is interesting"** - this could be about creating super-ambitious goals; about believing in solutions to huge societal challenges; about the challenge of getting genuine longer-term attention from policy makers; etc. Incremental issues don't typically get policy making attention.

★ **Value of time** - this has changed because of the pandemic. Delegates are now weighing up many other

factors when deciding to attend an event, so the value proposition needs to significantly be upgraded. This will have a big bearing on attendance numbers (particularly relevant for new generations).

- ★ **Changing personal values** and their impact on decisions to attend meetings (particularly relevant for new generations).
- ★ **"Now is the time for experimentation and testing"** – to what extent is Business Events sector embracing this philosophy, and how can it be made more widespread.
- ★ **Collaboration** - explore strength of destinations' Business Events collaborative ecosystems (definitions, how can we measure, how can we improve or create, what models work best (e.g., "community alignment triangle").
- ★ **Destination "agility"** (in relation to Business Events) – what does this mean; how can we measure; how can we improve. What can an agile destination do or offer that others cannot? Could we contrast "agile Business Events strategy" against "traditional 3-year Business Events strategy"?
- ★ **Destinations (and other Business Events players) as event creators and aggregators** – is this the future competitive direction or reality?
- ★ **Central experience districts and central social districts** – redesigning city centres with events at their heart.
- ★ Commercialising the **intellectual property outcomes from business events**.
- ★ **Using all the lessons from the Pandemic** (e.g., policy maker awareness of what happens when events stop meeting) in our future models & messages. How to avoid falling back into "bad old ways".
- ★ **Developed destinations' potential role in helping less-developed destinations use Business Events to move forward faster.** (Also, a DEI theme related to global equity). Especially relevant to Business Events sector in Africa.
- ★ **It's all about Delivery** - explore concept of how to fulfil promises and maximise value/impact. Identify how to overcome barriers preventing effective delivery.
- ★ **How can the Business Events industry stop being "badly tuned choir"** and become a harmonious single voice? Objectively analyse and find solutions, agreed messages, etc.
- ★ **Remote work mega-trend & implication for future of business events** (threats, opportunities, formats, culture, etc). Explore how Business Events can solve the challenge of "*hollowed out*" traditional city centres that previously relied on commuters working in large offices.
- ★ **The "Mutschlechner Model"** – commitment to spreading excellence to uplift the entire industry – discussion of concept, maybe pledge to adopt? (The "MM" derives from Christian Mutschlechner, retired Director of Vienna Convention Bureau, who had a policy of total transparency of their market-leading business model for any competing destination, arguing that understanding excellence was 10%, implementing was 90%, so by the time competitors improved to Vienna standards, Vienna would have evolved and improved further).
- ★ **Economic geographers and innovation economists:** are they writing about the strategic role of Business Events and if not, why not? Vital to be included in the most influential academic writing.