

Headquarters

SEPTEMBER 2024 #116 BUILDING BRIDGES IN THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY

HQ
THE ASSOCIATION
MAGAZINE

European Blind Union

"We must fight for accessibility and inclusion, and take everyone with us on this journey"

ICCA Future Leaders Council

Uplifting Next-Gen Meeting Professionals

Eurosif

How to Build Sustainable Social Investments?

FIEXPO Female Leaders

Leading the Way in Latin America's Meetings Industry

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*DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION:
BEST CASES AND SCENARIOS IN THE
ASSOCIATION WORLD*





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Editor's Letter



DIVERSITY: WHAT A TREASURE TROVE!

AUTHOR: MARCEL A.M. VISSERS, EDITOR IN CHIEF

One of the most beautiful and inspiring changes of our time has been the rise of 'diversity' as a guiding principle. I genuinely believe the world will be a better place if this mindset is given more room to grow in all corners of society. Historically, it takes about 50 years for a social movement to really take hold, and we are just beginning this journey. We still have many prejudices from the past to overcome.

For me, the best definition of diversity is this: "Diversity is the range of human differences, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical abilities or attributes, neurodivergent differences, religious or ethical value systems, national origin, and political beliefs." What a broad and powerful reflection of our world!

So, how do we actually recognise diversity in our day-to-day lives?

Last month, I found myself in a clinic for some tests, and something was written on the wall in big letters: "My body is different from yours." I found this statement incredibly poignant because that is where the story of accepting diversity begins. Healthy and strong people cannot simply assume everyone else is the same. The same goes for younger people. I encounter a kind of disdain for older people daily – 'ageing' they call it – as if you cease to be important when you grow older. The differences between people are infinite and must always be treated with respect.

Now, take a moment to look around you! Do you see different people?

Diversity has also become an essential dimension in the workplace. At *HQ*, a company based in Belgium, we have only one Belgian employee – the rest of my team comes from China, Portugal and Spain. Personally, I find this a great source of enrichment.

The three main benefits of diversity in the workplace are well-known:

1. Diversity pays off
2. Diversity makes us more creative and productive
3. Diversity enriches us as people and as employees

We are fortunate to work in an industry that values diversity. What a wealth of nationalities we represent! The meetings industry reaches every corner of the globe and shares one fundamental truth: "The more diverse we are, the more powerful and innovative we are."

And that, dear reader, is the theme of this edition. We celebrate the beauty and power of diversity throughout our industry in every article you'll read.

HQ #116

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**THE ASSOCIATION
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BUILDING BRIDGES
 IN THE MEETINGS
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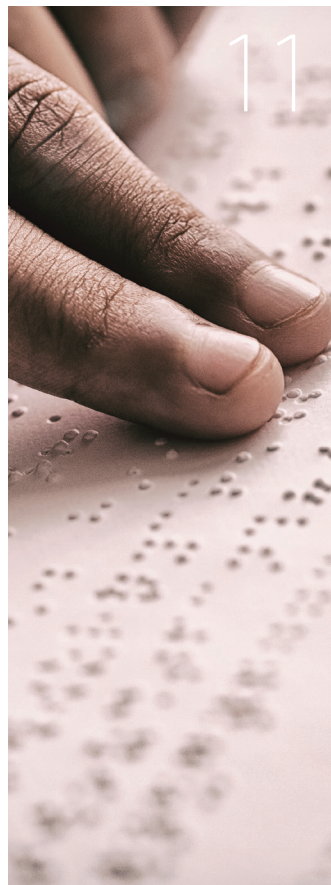
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80€ in Belgium
 95€ in the EU
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**European Blind
 Union**

"Diversity has
 to be lived fully
 and not just be a
 theory on paper"



Disclaimer

Note to readers: As you browse through this edition, you'll notice that, for consistency, we use the term DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion). However, some contributors refer to EDI, DEIB or JEDI, reflecting the diversity of perspectives and terminology in this important topic.

Samuel Sirois

"Creating a
 memorable dining
 experience starts
 with trust"





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Ottawa

Where great minds flow into Canada !



Geneva

A global city where everyone wants to live



FIEXPO

Women leading the way in Latin America's meetings industry



Eurosif

How to build sustainable social investments?



There is **no DEI without representation** – not even for Headquarters!

AUTHOR: MANUEL FERNANDES, MAGAZINE MANAGER

When we were planning this issue just before the summer, we realised together that a large part of our attention had been focused more on the editorial design of our structure than on the actual making of the pieces and interviews. This is unusual for our work process at HQ, but it has a simple explanation. In a vast ecosystem of associations (world?) geared towards Diversity, Equity and Inclusiveness, how do you include everyone within a palette of various shades, in an equal way? After several years of struggle to claim the rights of so many people on the margins of society, we do have a more heterogeneous, complex, and inclusive sector that has made social justice and belonging defining values of its identity and mission.

So, covering and following in the footsteps of all these great examples who have come to have a voice and a multidisciplinary agenda is a demanding task, and leaves us, as a barometer of associations, in an ambivalent curatorial dispute. It is not that the marginalised have moved into the mainstream, or that the causes of some are worth more than the flags of others. Responsible associations that listen to their members recognise the importance of parity when it comes to the inclusion needs of their delegates. The very evolution of our lifestyles, migration, health and safety challenges, digital progress and the sustainability of labour processes have brought new challenges and puzzles to inclusion and, in a way, increased social diversity. It is only natural that, over time, the issues we face change at the pace of the circumstances and the board we play on.

We have membership organisations advocating for a more accessible society by providing equal

opportunities for people with disabilities of all kinds (such as the **European Blind Union (EBU)**, which pushes for the full participation of blind and partially sighted people in all aspects of life); international organisations exclusively committed to connecting, promoting and empowering LGBT+ meeting professionals in the integration of their events (do not miss our Deputy Editor's interview with the **LGBT Meetings Professional Association**); how certain destinations are recognising the new substrata of society and aligning their event priorities with the impact they have on them (read our special report with **Ottawa Tourism**); we explore alternatives for convention centres to quantify their social value and facilitate accessibility guides for event planners (do not miss our story on **ACC Liverpool Group's** Social Value Plan to maximise impact in the region); and even how to break down gender barriers with women leading the way in the meetings industry in Latin America (find out about the personal journeys of two **FIEXPO** pioneers on their way to leadership positions in the tradeshow.)

During my conversation with the executive director of the EBU, I had the opportunity to ask him how their mission and journey could pave the social path of organisations from other sectors and link their activism with the causes of other groups. The answer was peremptory: "We often have to make alliances with other groups because we share the same struggle and the same difficulties (...) there are common characteristics and reasons for discrimination. At the end of the day, it is absolutely essential that society in general realises the benefits of planning something more accessible, as this will benefit everyone." Sometimes, it is not a question of special needs but of normal standard conditions!

HQ ESSENTIAL

INTERVIEWS & STORIES



ICCA's Future Leaders Council Offers Unique Opportunities for Next-Gen Meeting Professionals

ICCA has always supported and promoted inclusivity and the value of giving everyone a seat at the table. One of their **Guiding Principles** is Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and as an organisation, they believe that we are all stronger as a community when everyone has an opportunity to contribute and make their voices heard. Fostering the development of young professionals aligns with ICCA's goals of inclusivity and ensuring diverse views are represented within the meetings industry, helping to create a more inclusive and dynamic meetings community.

That's why the **ICCA Future Leaders Council (FLC)** project is such an important initiative. In 2019, ICCA's Board of Directors developed and launched the programme in response to what they saw as a need for emerging professionals to have a path forward into the industry. It was conceived to recruit and develop a younger cohort of global meetings professionals, provide the next generation of leaders with a roadmap into the community, and infuse our association with fresh perspectives. What sets the FLC apart from similar programmes is its focus on what ICCA can learn from young professionals. The FLC is closely aligned with ICCA's Innovation and DEI pillars. ICCA aims to adapt and implement the FLC initiatives across all ICCA strategies.

Participants are nominated by ICCA chapters from all regions, and candidates from around the world embark on a two-year commitment to complete several self-directed projects and activities under the guidance of the ICCA Board. Nominations are limited to individuals under the age of 33 with at least two years of experience in an ICCA member organisation.

A Path Forward for the New Cohort

Designed to give visibility and growth opportunities for emerging leaders, the FLC offers them practical experience in Board operations and strategic decision-making – all vital for developing leadership within the association meetings industry.

ICCA recognises the value of reaching out to members of our community who have historically been underrepresented in the meetings and events industry. The FLC aligns with ICCA's commitment to DEI in that it is an opportunity for a diverse array of participants from different backgrounds, countries, perspectives, and industry sectors to earn recognition from

peers and industry leaders. This year, ICCA's FLC was a finalist in the **DEI category of the European Association Awards**.

Mentorship, Collaboration, and Creativity

The FLC sees mentorship as an important way of helping young professionals chart a path to a successful future in the industry. The participants are guided by ICCA mentors and the board, and they learn a lot from each other, including how to work in international and cross-cultural teams. It is a two-way street – the board also learns a lot from the FLC members.

FLC member benefits include attendance at the annual **ICCA Congress** and **IMEX Frankfurt**, where they have unparalleled access to meetings and events industry players, as well as the opportunity to connect and network with industry leaders.



FLC members included participants from Asia-Pacific, Europe, North America, South America, Africa, and the Middle East. These young professionals have collaborated on projects ranging from social sustainability to innovative event formats, contributing valuable insights on information-gathering, process, structure, and recommendations for the future.

Creating Initiatives to Change the Future

One example of a project that came out of the FLC in 2023 was the **Engagement Toolkit**, which aims to guide ICCA chapters toward better engagement with young professionals and students via educational institutions, which was a precursor to ICCA’s revolutionary programme dedicated to students, **ICCAUni**.

Another project from 2022 tackled social sustainability from the perspective of young professionals, focusing on the post-pandemic world by recommending best practices for social sustainability, which they differentiate from environmental sustainability. This initiative aims to encourage meaningful connections within the industry and inspire the next generation of professionals.

The FLC members also play key roles in the **Young Professionals Forum**, leading up to the ICCA Congress,

showing their engagement and inspiring other young professionals. The Council’s efforts showed how integrating social initiatives into event planning could deepen participant connections and foster meaningful involvement.

Building a Bridge to the Future

ICCAUni, ICCA’s vanguard programme aimed at bridging the gap between the academic world and the business events industry, was born out of the FLC’s 2023 project, an engagement toolkit designed as a guide to encourage engagement with young professionals through targeted engagement with educational institutions.

Launched in 2024, ICCAUni offers scholarship programmes for students to attend the ICCA Congress, as well as mentoring programmes and internship opportunities that provide students with invaluable experience and unique insights into the world of global meetings and events. The programme also offers participating universities exposure and visibility, as well as research opportunities and the chance to network with like-minded institutions around the world.

For younger people just starting out in a career in meetings and events, finding a niche, network, and progress can be daunting. This is especially true for historically underrepresented groups who may not have seen themselves as capable of pursuing a career in the international business events industry.



Creating Opportunity and Lasting Impacts

The Future Leaders Council aims to help younger and previously marginalised individuals join the ranks of business events professionals and receive mentorship, career opportunities, and the chance to make a lasting impact on the industry. This unique leadership platform provides a golden opportunity for young professionals to build fulfilling and successful careers and facilitate ideas, concepts, and approaches that will help ICCA maintain its position as a thought leader within the association meetings and events industry.

Now let's hear from **Shelby Luzzi** (*pictured below*), **Senior Manager of Sustainability at Destination DC** and one of the FLC's members, about her journey since joining the other seven leaders and the exciting opportunities that have arisen as a result.

How has your participation in the FLC programme impacted your career opportunities in the industry?

As a Council member, I have had the opportunity to attend industry events that I would not have otherwise. In the past year, I have met so many new people in interesting roles, and each new connection is someone from whom I can learn. The FLC is also given a platform for our own voices. At both the ICCA Congress and IMEX Frankfurt, the FLC presents a project to the ICCA Board and attends ICCA Chapter meetings. Learning from the leaders of this industry is an incredibly valuable experience.

Moreover, I am the sustainability lead at my organisation. As a specialist in the industry, my time on the Council has exposed me to more roles and responsibilities within the events ecosystem. Proximity to the breadth of suppliers and buyers in this industry has allowed my view on sustainable events to mature rapidly.

Has the FLC provided opportunities for mentorship within your industry? If so, how?

As a Senior Sustainability Manager at a Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO), I have gained the most from the conversations I have had with my counterparts at other destinations. The sustainability leads of major trade shows and congresses have also taken the time to learn about my path in the industry so far, give feedback on my work at my DMO, and make good on their promises to keep in touch after the show. It is also worth noting that my region's ICCA Chapter leadership has taken the time to celebrate the achievements of the Council and to make sure the rest of the chapter knows my role within it.

How has the FLC encouraged your interest in pursuing a career in the industry?

I thrive on the spirit of collaboration and innovation, and that is exactly what the Council is about. Our eight voices represent different roles, experiences, perspectives, challenges, and solutions within the industry. Knowing that these members are representative of my peers across the globe, I feel excited for the future of our industry and potential for growth within it.

Did your participation in the FLC further your career goals? If so, why?

My participation in the FLC has absolutely furthered my career goals. The sustainability of our industry and of our destinations is the most important thing to me. My goal is that one day – after learning from today's experts and innovators – I can lead the conversation around a more responsible business events industry. The FLC has positioned me well, so that I have access to globally renowned decision-makers in my field. The ability to learn from them is truly priceless for a young professional.



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“Diversity has to be lived fully and not just be a theory on paper”

The **European Blind Union (EBU)**, a non-profit NGO representing visually impaired people, brings together national independent associations and members with full legal status under the umbrella of the organisation. The background to this union was the recognition that together, they could have a much greater voice and impact with European decision-makers and institutions in drafting legislation and advocating on behalf of their community. This year, they are celebrating an important date as an organisation – the 40th anniversary of their creation in 1984, which is a testament to the EBU's longevity and dynamism on an international scale. *HQ* spoke to **Lars Bosselmann (pictured right), Executive Director of EBU**, about working together to improve the rights of blind and partially sighted people across Europe.



How do you see this collective image of Europe as a more inclusive society for people with visual impairments? What are the great examples that you highlight in this race for progress?

In terms of achievements, we would have to highlight the *European Accessibility Act*, which was a great victory for our community. There has also been a lot of lobbying in favour of the single euro currency to make coins and banknotes more accessible to our community, with improvements planned for the next generation of euro banknotes. Another result is the Braille labelling of pharmaceutical products and medicines, which was due to our advocacy work and has become a standard over time.

Of course, things are changing; new technologies have great potential and bring with them many innovations. However, they also bring with them the challenge of accessibility, and if alternatives to other means of digital communication are not accessible, this can be a problem. If an online bank is not accessible and does not have a human alternative, this apparent progress can lead to exclusion, especially in areas where it is a question of financial data privacy and the independence of processes. In fact, it is an elimination of choice and that is our main message regarding these new technological resources. Technology has greatly opened up access to information for blind and partially sighted people, and it would be foolish for us to be conservative in rejecting it. However, we must fight for accessibility and inclusion, and be sure to take everyone with us on this journey.

It is estimated that more than 30 million people in Europe suffer from total blindness or partial visual impairment, a figure that not only reflects the enormous obstacles these people face in accessing employment or education, but also weighs heavily on other social groups such as women, the elderly and ethnic minorities. How is your work linked to the causes of other socially disadvantaged groups?

There is an internal and external response to this issue. I do not think any organisation can claim to be perfect when it comes to inclusion and diversity, because there are many aspects to consider and bringing them all together is a big challenge. We are working internally to speed up the creation of committees that take care of our own diversity in different positions, whether leadership or secretarial. As for the external component, I think we need to form alliances with other groups in the population because blind and partially sighted people share the same struggles and difficulties. Although we cannot completely say that women or the LGBTQ+ community face the same problems, there are common characteristics and reasons for this discrimination. At the end of the day, it is absolutely essential that society in general realises the benefits of planning accessibility for a blind or partially sighted person, as this will benefit not only disabled communities but society as a whole. It is not just about special needs, as part of our advocacy work is quite straightforward and includes cross-cutting aspects for various groups.



The EBU Board in 2024. Back row, standing, from left to right - Dagmar Filgasova, David Aldwinckle, Jakob Rosin, Hubert Perfler, Andreas Havsberg, Anja Uršič, Sabine Stroem. Front row, seated, from left to right - Roland Studer, Kevin Kelly, Tytti Matsinen, Bárbara Martín Muñoz, Maria Thorstensson (absent, Sinan Tafaj). Photo credit: Terhi Korhonen

What do you expect from this next European executive and the budgetary framework to act towards a more inclusive Union? Do you feel that your voice and interests are represented in Brussels?

There is no black and white answer, because it depends on the subject and sometimes the legislation, as well as the type of institutional set-up we are talking about. Overall, I think there is a clear willingness on the part of the European Commission to involve and dialogue with NGOs like ours on topics that interest us. In addition, the European Parliament is usually an excellent ally for highlighting our legislative problems and legal barriers.

When it comes to the Member States, it is a little more difficult to balance the scales, as there is a fear that too much legislation will mean additional costs for businesses or that new laws could be restrictive to businesses. We have to convince them otherwise, not least because this agenda is not exclusive to our cause, but to many other minorities. In spite of the single market, conditions differ widely in European countries. Minimum standards need to be harmonised so as not to impose an additional burden on the implementation of accessibility laws. In my opinion, the only way to do this is using both a legal and voluntary framework. We should establish European rules that are comprehensive and easy to implement to give companies, individuals and organisations room to manoeuvre. As I said before, if websites and banking apps had accessible rules and universal measures today, then everything would already be in place.

What recommendations and guidelines would you recommend for European associations to become more responsible? What can associations do to improve their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion culture?

Diversity has to be lived fully and not just be a theory on paper. It has to be visible and reflect the leadership of organisations, as it is important both for the credibility and power of the message as well as for its internal and external consistency. Of course, organisations need specific organisational policies – there must be defined rules and targets. I am not necessarily talking about quotas, which would take us to another discussion, but I think it is important to set targets for inclusion and diversity. The other thing I think organisations can do is work on the accessibility of their own procedures, IT infrastructure, communication tools, etc. A few years ago, this was hardly an issue, but we see more and more people interested in making their promotional videos accessible and inclusive, by inserting subtitles or audio descriptions or including alternative texts next to the images. All of these things are important and can be solved quickly. It is also important on the inclusion journey to get some quick wins to show off. This can be done by selecting a location where accessibility can influence the communications and IT infrastructure, a suitable in-house technical team, or an adapted meeting room.

What are the priorities and demands that the EBU raises when choosing a destination to host its conference? What special attention do you ask for your visually impaired delegates?

There are three dimensions to this question. One is the location to ensure that the hotel or congress centre has a sufficient level of physical accessibility – ideally with Braille labels and large print documentation so that our delegates can navigate the space quickly. This is a critical aspect that we try to safeguard with the host organisation by effectively training staff on the ground. How to guide a visually impaired person in the venue; where things need to be physically placed; how to organise the circulation and movement in the venue. Physical adaptations are necessary, but they are usually added as the team is trained. The second aspect is the journey from the airport/train station to the venue. Here, it is very important that people have the relevant information in advance. What is the best option for travelling; what are the costs, distance, and obstacles. If this is not provided in good time, it can cause significantly more stress for blind or visually impaired people than it would for sighted people. The third is about communication and the presentations expected at the conference. I would say, for example, that the use of PowerPoints is superfluous and does not add any value to a visually impaired audience. On the contrary, descriptive presentations and verbal information can work much better. It would also help to make digital material available in advance so that delegates can access it on the way to the conference, and do not necessarily have to print it out in Braille on the spot.

Finally, what major institutional events are you preparing at the moment?

The most important event for us will be next November in Brussels, where we will try to bring together as many parliamentarians as possible to analyse our requests over the next five years. We want to build some alliances to bring them over to our side, to ensure that when they vote, draft and comment on pieces of legislation, they can keep this inclusion perspective in mind. Then, a different activity for next year will be the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the invention of the Braille code. The invention of Braille means a lot of autonomy, access to information and education for blind and partially sighted people and, to mark this anniversary, we will be planning a series of physical events, but mainly online activities and celebrations in 2025.

“

Braille has evolved effectively over time and is perfectly adapted to modern times and digital communication.

A close-up of fingers reading a text in braille.



Creating a Memorable Dining Experience Starts with Trust

How can you cater for large numbers of guests without losing quality and attention to hospitality? How can we make it a less stressful, simpler and more fun experience?

Quality must be on top of everything. If I am not sure I can deliver quality to my guests, I refuse to do the event – that is the first part of my motto. Then, the difficulties I have faced on my journey as a chef have given me the opportunity to develop greater sensitivity and the chance to understand people better. My clients' needs are crucial to me, so I need to understand them well and create a climate of mutual sharing. In other words, I need to know their special needs (socio-cultural habits, religious needs, rituals, etc.), allergies, and special diets (ovo-lacto, vegan, pescetarian), or simply their preferences. On the other hand, they have to understand my reality (the number of people working in the kitchen, the service of the event, the equipment, the atmosphere of the event, etc.), and the real capacity of the team to meet their needs and desires. Dining out is a huge responsibility for the host. The first responsibility as a chef/host is to demonstrate trust and clarity with guests/clients. When people feel safe and understood, they are somehow reassured about what comes next. In these cases, it is easier for both sides to participate with less stress.

Do you think event planners and organisers still treat food as an afterthought? Do you think more emphasis should be placed on catering at events?

Unfortunately, I would say yes, but as in other areas, change is happening at a very fast pace. There are many different offers and the competition is fierce and sometimes brutal. So, as time goes by, people seem to be paying more attention to the food on offer in the events sector. However, for me, as a player in the food and catering industry, there definitely needs to be more emphasis on catering. Paying attention to food and service is like having insurance in case something goes wrong during the event; at least the guests will remember that the food was good and the service was kind. Let's remember that smell and taste are very primitive senses. Therefore, it is easier to cater to the client's other needs once these senses are satisfied. Catering should not

Samuel Sirois is a chef and cookery instructor at the **Institut de Tourisme et d'Hôtellerie du Québec** in Montreal, Canada. With more than 20 years' experience in the culinary industry, he is a highly-regarded chef who has represented Canada at culinary competitions such as the **Bocuse d'or Canada 2019, Americas 2022, and the World in Lyon 2023**, and he has also participated in some unique events around the world such as the **Tram Experience 2023** in Brussels or the **Columbia Food & Wine Festival 2024**. Although today his profession is more geared towards teaching future chefs, he is still involved in the industry, not only in the kitchen, but also in catering, services, hotels, events and banquets. Samuel works closely with **Tourisme Montréal** and was the protagonist of a conversation with *HQ* that crossed the catering and F&B sectors, with the social inclusion of food and the gastronomic diversity presented on the different palates of the delegates.



be seen as a ‘cherry on top’ in the events sector, but as a fundamental aspect to be considered above everything else.

How do you manage to add an identity stamp to the cuisine of a destination without excluding any of your guests? How to include all those with dietary restrictions, allergies or food intolerances around a dish that is essential to your service?

It is simply impossible for me not to be inclusive, especially nowadays. As a Canadian, I am the result of all the cultures, traditions and shares of the people who have settled in my country, and this is reflected in my cuisine. As a chef, I consider myself an open-minded person today, so I can understand the importance of the identity of the cuisine, regardless of the circumstances. Including everyone is particularly good, but it is excessively demanding. Being a good chef means being able to adapt to all kinds of situations. Sometimes I have to face many challenges in the kitchen at the same time in order to respect all dietary restrictions, allergies, intolerances and/or cultural traditions. It is like being a tightrope walker and having to cross a thin wire. Whenever possible, I try to

offer something to replace the problematic ingredient or dish if I know of a last-minute restriction. However, if I know that an ingredient or dish could be a problem for the customer, I usually simply choose to create another dish that meets the customer’s needs. Furthermore, these situations are opportunities to acquire solid knowledge of gastronomic creation: sometimes, I have substituted an ingredient and had the happy surprise of discovering new flavour associations. Gastronomy is plastic and malleable; you can always play with it if you are open to the diversity of cultures that inhabit this planet.

Therefore, do you have any suggestions on how to sufficiently and effectively communicate (before AND during the event), and how to organise and arrange the dish-delivery process smoothly, to improve the overall dining experience?

The more people you have on both sides – kitchen and service – the harder it is to communicate effectively and avoid mistakes. This is especially true when it comes to crucial information, such as a potentially life-threatening allergy or dietary restrictions that need to be accommodated. Experience has taught me that in these situations it is best to have a single responsible person on each side, both in the kitchen and at the service level. You may say that this puts a strain on the human resources of a restaurant or event, but for me, it is crucial and unthinkable to do otherwise. We are talking about the difference between life and death, or at least between a healthy experience and a very unpleasant one.

In the kitchen, we always have an organised station to compensate for this type of situation, where everything is perfectly clean, safe and free of potential allergens. The person in charge prepares the food, the chef checks it and the head of the service brigade deals only with the target customer who needs this special attention. This organisational chain is the key to ensuring the smooth running and monitoring of the customer experience. This is an extremely expensive way for a restaurant or hotel to operate. For me, it leaves no chance of risking allergies or restrictions. The whole culinary experience depends on the host’s ability to build a relationship of trust with guests. As a chef, I find it very difficult to deal with the stress that the production of a dish can create when we talk about taking allergies into account. Simply because I feel responsible for providing not only the best possible culinary experience, but also an exceptional customer experience.



What kind of interactive gastronomic experiences have you carried out at events? In your experience, how can these activities raise the profile of a destination?

One of the activities that is not only interesting but also very captivating is the use of liquid nitrogen to create spontaneous ice cream. For example, during a promotional event, I made a special ice cream using camelina seed oil. Without the use of nitrogen, I would have had to use other processes, including food additives, which were not necessary in this case. It was wonderful because people discovered the taste of the oil, but they also got to see and experience another way of using the product. I also ran workshops on local vegetables and the fermentation process, which can highlight these vegetables. This becomes extremely interesting for people because they can taste products they know, but which have new flavours due to fermentation and preservation.

Planners need to make sure that the people attending the workshops are at least as interested as they are. For us, it is an opportunity to talk about our passion and introduce them to a particular world. Obviously, sharing knowledge, passion and techniques can enhance a destination, even encouraging clients to choose one place over another. People like the opportunity to take part in new experiences, and passion breeds passion. Sharing your art and knowledge with others is a moment that should remain in the memory of all participants. The impression of participating in the creation of a menu necessarily leads to free advertising or, at the very least, customer loyalty. Customers are human beings and they like to be considered, understood and respected in their choices. Therefore, if the interaction is well constructed, it will add value to the customer’s destination. The basis of the food industry is sharing, and we must never forget that.





Advocating for DEI in a Challenging Global Landscape

JESÚS GUERRERO CHACÓN, DEPUTY EDITOR

In January 2024, the **Spanish Centre for Sociological Research** published a survey highlighting a worrying perception among Spaniards regarding gender equality. According to the survey, 44.1% of people who identified as male believe that efforts to promote gender equality have gone too far, resulting in discrimination against them. Surprisingly, 32.5% of people who identified as female echoed the same feeling, suggesting a perceived excess of rights. These statistics reveal a wider backlash against efforts to promote gender equality and achieve equity. What would a similar poll on other rights reveal? Do people think that LGBTQIA2+ rights have also gone too far? What about the rights of other vulnerable communities? Would it explain the constant attacks on our rights and the never-ending hate speech?

During Pride month, a councillor from a far-right party in Spain claimed: “They are not oppressed. They are not victims. And they have more privileges than anyone else.” In response, a left-wing councillor argued, “We are not asking for privileges; we are asking for the same rights as any other citizen.” This striking disagreement raises the question: Do they truly see the LGBTQIA2+ community as privileged? Especially when the Spanish Ministry of the Interior reported a 21.3% increase in hate crimes in 2023 only, including crimes based on racism, xenophobia, sexual orientation, gender identity and ideology.

The recent European Union elections gave the LGBTQIA2+ community some breathing space, with a smaller than expected rise in far-right parties. However, the upcoming US elections in November still have many on edge, given the potential global implications. It is more important than ever for the community and allies to unite and vote for those who support equality and respect for rights. In the meetings industry, it is vital to be proactive in implementing strategies, campaigns and contingency plans to counter anti-DEI measures by elected governments. This proactive approach will help create a welcoming and safe environment for all employees and attendees, regardless of the political climate in challenging destinations.

The global landscape for LGBTQIA2+ rights is full of challenges, particularly in countries where far-right and traditional conservative parties hold significant power. Organisations such as **ILGA Europe** highlight these issues through tools such as the **Rainbow Map**, which ranks European countries according to their legislative developments on LGBTQIA2+ issues. The map shows a striking contrast between countries that are advancing LGBTQIA2+ rights and those that are regressing under the influence of the far-right. Let’s take Spain as an example: a champion of progress in this area is now in danger of going backwards, with regional and local governments trying to erase the visibility and rights of LGBTQIA2+ people.

These issues hit close to home. Despite its progressive reputation, Spain is facing a resurgence of conservative forces that are undermining LGBTQIA2+ rights. While they boast that our capital is one of the best LGBTQIA2+ destinations in the world and that its Pride celebrations are the largest in the country, attracting thousands of participants, the reality is very different. Its regional laws have resulted in significant cuts to trans and LGBTQIA2+ rights, particularly in areas such as health, education and documentation. The Spanish Constitutional Court has already suspended these regressive reforms. There has also been a worrying trend to trivialise Pride through pinkwashing tactics. For example, instead of supporting local associations or prominently displaying the rainbow

flag, officials have promoted the event with a poster full of clichés and stereotypes, reducing Pride to a mere mass celebration devoid of its true meaning and significance. Some other local authorities, the rainbow flag has been controversially compared to diseases such as cancer, Alzheimer's and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. An embarrassing comparison, which the Spanish Ministry of Equality has asked to be withdrawn since the **World Health Organisation** declared in 1990 that homosexuality is no longer considered a mental illness, and declarations like that reinforce stigmatisation.

Even with these challenges, there are reasons for hope. Thailand's recent legalisation of same-sex marriage is a significant milestone, making it the first country in Southeast Asia to recognise such unions. This positions Thailand as a benchmark for LGBTQIA2+ rights in Asia, alongside Taiwan and Nepal, which have similar laws. In addition, the **Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau** has launched a new **Pink Plus Economy** campaign to promote LGBTQ tourism, including sectors such as health, wellness and wealth. This initiative represents a significant step forward in DEI efforts within the meetings industry.

In Europe, several countries have taken strong stances against conversion therapy, showcasing a commitment to protecting LGBTQIA2+ individuals from harmful practices. Estonia, for instance, recently became the first Baltic state to legalise same-sex marriage, marking a historic moment for the region.

While such progress is encouraging, it highlights the need for a broader commitment to DEI values that protect not only LGBTQIA2+ rights, but the rights and dignity of all vulnerable communities, as governments withdraw rights and reduce the visibility of organisations' advocacy, the meetings industry cannot ignore that. In an increasingly global and interconnected world, failing to address discriminatory laws, measures, and hate speech of any kind and against any community enacted by certain governments can have significant repercussions on events hosted in those destinations. Such environments may become less safe for locals and tourists, and less attractive to conference participants, who might choose to avoid attending events in these areas altogether. Recent events in the UK in late July and early August highlight the growing tension on the streets, as thousands of anti-racist protesters formed human shields around asylum centres

and law firms in response to far-right-led rallies and the violence incited by immigration laws and hate speech.

The message is clear: we must stand strong, protect our communities and unite against the spread of hate. Convention bureaux and centres should not only create safe spaces during the events they host but also work to ensure that the destination and surrounding areas, including venues and hotels, are welcoming to all delegates before, during and after the events. This includes ensuring that delegates have a positive experience when they venture out onto the streets, as safety should not end at the doorstep of the venues. Collaborating with local and international organisations, providing educational resources to the local community and using economic impact to advocate for policy change are key steps in achieving this goal.



Associations and other organisations can significantly impact local communities by forming partnerships, fundraising, and promoting DEI at their events and operations. By implementing inclusive hiring practices, supporting diverse-owned businesses, and offering scholarships to underrepresented groups, industry players can foster an inclusive environment that respects and celebrates all kinds of people, whoever they are.

This is a wake-up call for the meetings industry – a sector with significant capacity to promote human rights. Now is not the time to passively support DEI values; we must actively promote diversity, equality and inclusion of all kinds, as we cannot allow hate and discrimination to win. Associations, convention bureaux, venues and meeting planners must actively promote diverse and inclusive events, even in the face of political opposition. This includes ensuring diverse representation among speakers and panellists, creating safe spaces and training staff on DEI values. These efforts should not leave behind the fights for gender equality, LGBTQIA2+ rights, racial and ethnic justice, disability rights, economic justice, religious freedom, age equality and the rights of immigrants and refugees.

To learn more about how the meetings industry can advance DEI, particularly for the LGBTQIA2+ community, don't miss our interview with **Cameron Curtis, Executive Director of the LGBT Meetings Professionals Association**.



Building Inclusive Spaces: Insights from LGBT MPA's New Strategic Plan

Following the launch of their **New Strategic Plan** in August 2024, *HQ* sits down with **Cameron Curtis, CMM, CAE (she/they), Executive Director of the LGBT Meeting Professionals Association (LGBT MPA)**. Curtis shares insights into key initiatives and priorities designed to foster collaboration, grow membership and create an inclusive environment where the LGBTQIA2+ community and its allies feel accepted and valued. Learn how the LGBT MPA is addressing current challenges and leading the way for diversity, equality and inclusion in the global meetings industry.



Could you provide a brief overview of the key initiatives and priorities in LGBT MPA's new strategic plan and how they align with the association's updated mission and vision statements?

When we revised our mission and vision in March of this year, it was critical for us to ensure that we, as the voice of the LGBTQIA2+ global events community, focused on creating value for all our stakeholders. As we worked on our new strategic plan, we kept the mission and vision front of mind to guarantee alignment. We also ensured there was broad representation at the table during the in-person strategy retreat to include destination marketing organisations (DMOs), both domestic and international, hotel brands, and the planner community. The outcome focuses on four main priorities: educating diverse audiences; enhancing partner relations; growing and engaging membership, through our

new membership model; and advocating for the LGBTQIA2+ global events community.

What are the association's biggest challenges in promoting inclusion and diversity within the events industry?

The biggest challenges facing the events industry when it comes to creating inclusive events are: unconscious biases that influence choices like choosing vendors or selecting speakers; lack of diverse role models that can perpetuate a cycle where certain groups are underrepresented; accessibility issues – ensuring everyone can participate equally, means thinking through accessibility needs of your attendees beyond disabilities that are visibly apparent; and resource constraints – implementing inclusive practices often

requires additional resources (financial and physical) that may be a barrier for smaller organisations or events.

With the rise of far-right governments threatening LGBTQIA2+ rights, how can LGBT MPA help convention bureaux and venues, which rely on local government support, to continue advocating for the LGTBIQ+ community?

We spend a lot of time discussing the impact of discriminatory legislation on the global events industry and our role in advocating for the LGBTQIA2+ community. The LGBTQIA2+ community is intersectional, meaning it spans across race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality, etc., so we must pay attention to legislation that not only discriminates against the LGBTQIA2+ community, but also considers how it impacts safety in other ways – e.g., reproductive healthcare/ rights or racial discrimination. We know that boycotts are not always effective when it comes to changing legislation and, in some cases, contracts are executed so far in advance that we cannot foresee future legislative issues or the impact on event attendees. However, we also want to ensure the LGBTQIA2+ community is safe when they travel to events in destinations with discriminatory legislation, so we are openly discussing all points of view. Our new strategic priorities of enhancing partner relations and advocating for the LGBTQIA2+ events community will offer an opportunity for LGBT MPA to do more to address the issues through education and the creation of resources, guidelines, and best practices in collaboration with our DMO/CVB partners and planner members.

What advice would you give to LGBT+ and allied meeting professionals who want to create more inclusive and welcoming event environments?

Every time I speak or moderate a session for the LGBT MPA, I learn something new. One thing we do not consider is that some people are not out and may not want to have their photo taken at an LGBT+ networking event, so creating a photo-free zone is important. We talk a lot about the data we collect on registration forms – make sure there is a legitimate business use for collecting information like gender identity or accessibility needs and always offer a ‘prefer not to say’ option. I am a big fan of pronouns! People see my first name and mistake me for male, when my gender identity is female, so giving me an opportunity to provide pronouns immediately creates a feeling of inclusion. If you are going to offer the opportunity to select pronouns, make sure you include them all. Currently: **He/Him/His; He/They; She/Her/Hers; She/They; They/Them;** and remember They/Them is singular. Finally, openly share your unique solutions with others and

attend sessions on creating inclusive events – if you do not see any, provide that feedback to event organisers. Being open to learning and sharing is a big step in creating inclusive events where attendees feel they belong.

In our conversation with Elena (Gerstmann) from SocialOffset in the previous edition, it was emphasised that congress-goers are increasingly boycotting events or destinations that do not conform to their values. Have you noticed delegates refusing to attend events in specific destinations?

People and organisations are boycotting events that do not align with their values, and destinations with discriminatory laws. If you are going to boycott, be sure to have all the facts first and do not be silent about it. There are many destinations/venues, especially in the US, that are just as frustrated with their state laws, and they are working hard to affect change. If the destination or event organisers do not know you are boycotting, then your voice is going unheard, and they may need your voice to prove a point. If you want to make an impact, send your RFP and then share that, while the destination or venue is a great fit, you are declining a proposal because of the discriminatory legislation, or tell the event organiser that you have chosen not to register so they have a record of your dissent. Then ask what you can do to help. If you are an organisation and have no way out of a contract, then work with the DMO or the Conventions and Visitors Bureau to find ways that you and your attendees can support the LGBTQIA2+ community in that destination through organisations like the **National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce** or **SocialOffset**, and be transparent with attendees about why you cannot cancel your event.

With WorldPride coming to Washington, DC, in 2025, marking the 50th anniversary of Pride celebrations there, do you see an opportunity for LGBT MPA to partner with the destination’s stakeholders, such as the bureau, venues, hotels, and event planners?

I live in the DC Metro Area and I am so excited for this event next year! I have been to DC Pride and when I leave, I wish every day of the year could be like that – surrounded by love, acceptance, and people who can be their authentic selves. We hope there is an opportunity for LGBT MPA to engage and we are beginning to have those conversations. We felt it was important to solidify our mission, vision, and strategy and then look for opportunities that align and strengthen LGBT MPA and the LGBTQIA2+ global events community.





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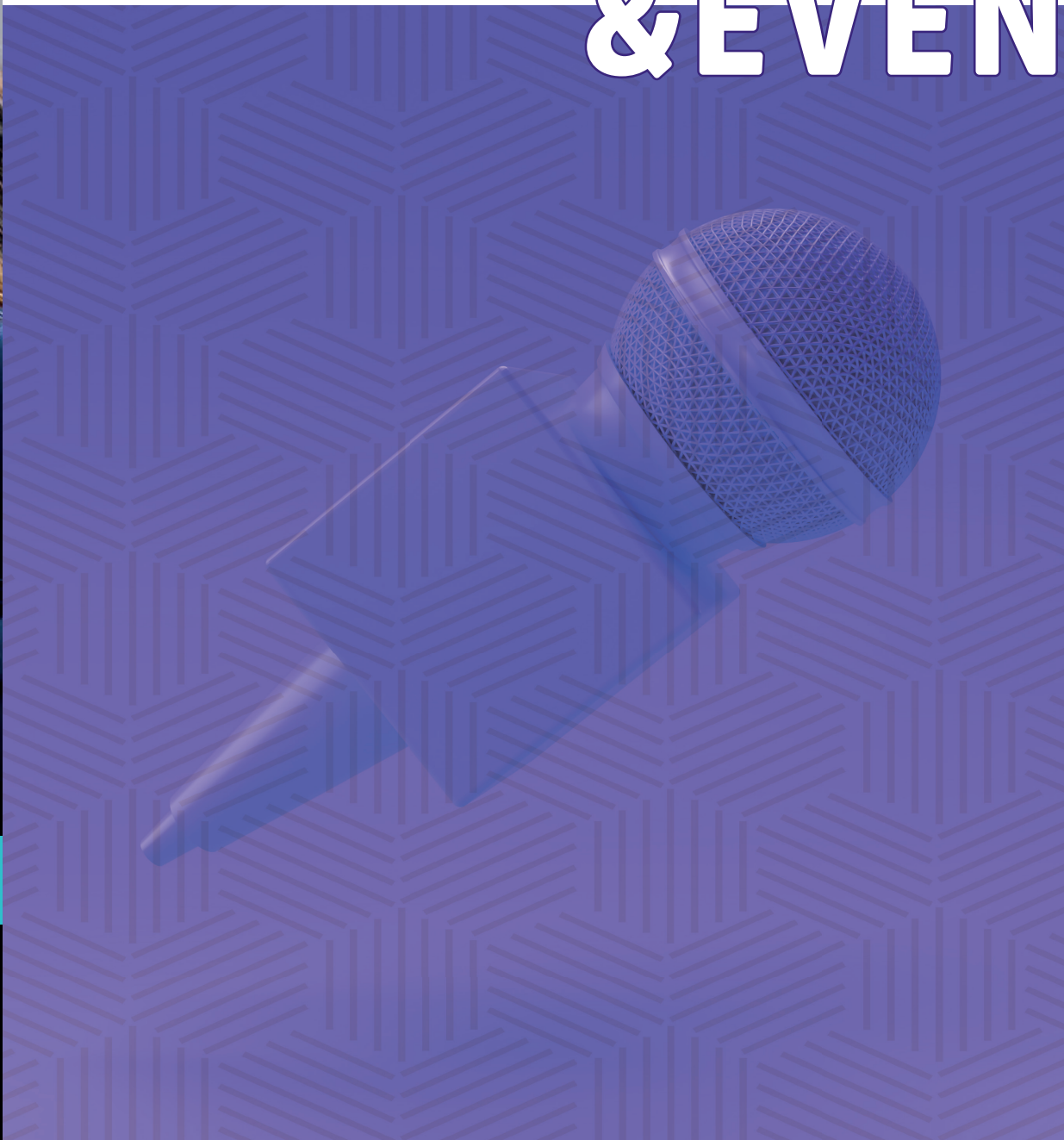
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ACC LIVERPOOL:

Sustainability, Accessibility and Social Value



Since the launch of the first **Social Value Plan** in 2022, **ACC Liverpool Group** has put social value front and centre, maximising the positive impact it has on the local area. Looking ahead, the organisation has prioritised initiatives that reinforce its environmental sustainability strategy, maximising the legacy of events and ensuring that its campus is as accessible as possible. *HQ* spoke to them about the social value of the Group and the lasting impact on the Liverpool city region and beyond.

Over the past year, **ACC Liverpool Group** – owner of **ACC Liverpool**, **Exhibition Centre Liverpool** and the **M&S Bank Arena** – has worked hard to integrate social value throughout its organisation, turning new initiatives into policies and processes that have become second nature to its spaces. Their social impact report looks at the progress the group has made in championing sustainability for its communities and workforce. “Social value impact has become critical to our business in order to respond to the world around us and the needs of our customers and clients. Although we operate in international markets, our Impact Plan recognises the responsibility towards our hometown. We do this through the four main pillars of **People, Environmental Sustainability, Industry Influence and Community**,” **Adrian Evans, Director of Conference & Business Events at ACC Liverpool Group**, tells us. Its charitable strategy aims to support projects and initiatives that will directly make a difference to people living in the community.

Achievements so far include carbon-neutral status, a **Green Meetings Silver accreditation**, a Legacy Champions network, a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) workplace strategy and the creation of a citywide Accessibility Forum in partnership with **Liverpool ONE**. “We ensure that any event legacy projects benefit our

local community and align with the city region priorities such as food poverty and health inequality. Our focus is to build a business that truly represents the diverse communities we serve.” As a result, the organisation’s social value has increased by £1.1m (€1.29m) to a current £6.4m in 2023/24 (around €7.5m), using the **National TOMs Framework** to calculate this investment. The **Themes, Outcomes and Measures (TOMs)**, developed by the **Social Value Portal**, is a British framework that provides a robust and reliable way of evidencing an organisation’s social value activity and responsibly driving sustainable business. “We chose to work with Social Value Portal because it aligns closely with the four pillars within our social value strategy by providing a ready-made set of KPIs. Measurement and quantification are essential so that we can benchmark our progress and set appropriate targets for the coming years,” adds Evans.



We are committed to ensuring our business does not negatively impact the community by supporting our local city region as much as we can.

Empowering event organisers to create truly welcoming and accessible experiences, ACC Liverpool launched in February a toolkit full of tips, resources and best practice suggestions for all stages of the planning process, from initial concept to post-event evaluation. Through its **Accessibility Strategy**, the company has also introduced improvements throughout its venues to help clients create more inclusive, safe and accessible events. “Accessibility is a key part of our community strand, and we have made great strides in this direction, such as recently achieving **Gold accreditation** from **Attitude is Everything** this year for the M&S Bank Arena. We have also been working with Liverpool ONE, another leading organisation in the city, to create an Accessibility Forum made up of individuals with valuable life experience. Our aim is to encourage a joint approach to creating an accessible city region.” The venue has also partnered with **AccessAble**, the UK’s leading provider of detailed access information, making available an access guide to help event planners better understand the various access requirements across the campus. Organisers will be able to include a link to the guide in their pre-event communications, and delegates will have a free app to access the guide conveniently on the go.

ACC Liverpool has been working with leading sustainability organisation **Carbon Neutral Britain** to measure total organisational emissions in order to put a carbon reduction plan in place. “We continue to take steps to become a more sustainable business, and last year, we achieved carbon neutrality across our entire campus. We were also the first large site to become a member of **Isla**, which is supporting our journey towards Net-Zero Carbon emissions.” Furthermore, they have a roadmap to achieve this Net Zero Carbon target by 2030, in line with the City Council, which has committed to making Liverpool a climate-positive city by that year. Another related workstream concerns the diversity of the workforce that they have managed through the ‘People’ pillar, driving changes in the organisation to reflect the Liverpool City Region. “We know that potential candidates are making decisions based on a complex set of criteria; organisations that are committed to their people, sensitive to the local context and supportive of local communities is a crucial part of that process,” says Evans. “We hold regular volunteering days at local charities, have a wellbeing forum to ensure staff can influence policy, and a colleague-led Charity Champs group who fundraise for our foundation.”

“ *We want to share social initiatives with our colleagues to create a workplace that employees are proud to be a part of.* ”

ACC Liverpool Foundation works in the area of social solidarity to encourage local community groups and voluntary organisations to apply for projects that aim to support and reach important community groups and diverse communities, through a fund administered by the **Community Foundation for Merseyside**. “In particular, we seek to support groups whose aims align with the priorities of our city region, such as initiatives targeting marginalised and hard-to-reach groups, food poverty and health inequality. In a bid to support music infrastructure in the city, the next round of funding will also provide investment for grassroots music projects,” says Evans. But the grants don’t stop there: “This year, we’re supporting charities such as **End Furniture Poverty**, providing bed packs for children in Merseyside, **Knowsley Foodbank**, distributing basic baby items to families, and the **Opening Doors Project** via a food bank with two home-cooked meals a day and slow-cooking courses to encourage the cooking of healthy meals.” In addition, they also support people with new skills through **Porchfield Community Association**, which will develop a programme addressing the educational, social and health needs of older people through digital training and handwriting classes; the **Bobby Collieran Trust** runs an 8-week arts and crafts therapy programme targeting children’s wellbeing, confidence, resilience skills; and the **Comedy Trust** which supports young people’s mental health and wellbeing through stand-up comedy. For this project, they partnered with a school to work with LGBTQ+ pupils.





Ottawa: Where Great Minds Flow into Canada!



Located in the province of Ontario, Ottawa is Canada's most educated city and a centre for knowledge-based industries, with over 1,900 companies employing more than 75,000 people. The advantages of hosting large conferences and business events here are, therefore, numerous, converging specialisation and centrality. *HQ's Magazine Manager, Manuel Fernandes*, was at the beautiful **Gleneagles Hotel and Resort** in Scotland, where he spoke to the **Ottawa Tourism team**.

With a million English and French-speaking inhabitants and hundreds of international embassies, Ottawa has more people working in Engineering, ICT, Health and Life Sciences, Clean Technology and Aerospace, Defence and Security per capita than any other city in Canada. It is only natural then that it regularly rolls out the red carpet to associations and event organisers, competing with more popular cities like Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. The **Shaw Centre**, Ottawa's convention space of excellence, recognised with the **AIPC APEX Award** in 2020, hosts prestigious international events as well as important local and national gatherings that help support the local economy. Last June, *HQ* travelled to the Scottish Lowlands to take part in a fun get-together with planners and event managers, which, according to **Lesley Pincombe, Vice-President of Meetings and Major Events at Ottawa Tourism**, was quite intentional: "We see this as a bit of a first date. We want them to have an idea of what they might find that might be suitable for their conference. We do not choose people at random – we know which organisations they represent or whether they want to collaborate with a Canadian association or a centre of excellence like the **Ottawa Heart Institute**." And as with the first date, it is best not to be too bold: "What we have experienced are lifelong ambassadors and the engagement

with these guests has been very positive. Especially in the UK and EU countries, where the image of Ottawa is based very loosely on the assumption of the capital and little else!"

Ottawa carries the weight of most government offices, so all policies are informed and decided here by parliamentarians. From the **National Defence Headquarters** to the **National Research Council**, from **Health Canada** to **Statistics Canada**, this political representation makes it an attractive location for conferences and conventions of all kinds. In addition, there are also more than 600 Canadian associations based in Ottawa, which facilitate international collaborations or congresses mediated by a national partner. Ottawa Tourism also has very deep ties with the economic development team, **Invest Ottawa**. "They are the ones who drive start-ups and a lot of foreign investment, so they act as valuable bridges to reach this network of high-level individuals who can become keynote speakers and help promote certain areas." The city also has universities and hospitals that are well integrated into the Ottawa ecosystem: "We have **Carleton, Ottawa U, Algonquin College**, as well as the French college **La Cité**, all of which have good research and development departments collaborating closely with the university hospitals."





There is a great deal of expertise here to attract vast investment in these ecosystems: “Right now, we are building a super hospital (**The Ottawa Hospital Civic Campus**), and if we want the best talent and professionals to come here, their families have to see themselves in this community. It is not just about coming to work in a new hospital, we have to build a city where people want to pursue their lives,” adds Pincombe.

Since the pandemic, Ottawa has seen a decline in individual business travel, which has led to a greater focus on organising conferences. “We know that the return on investment for international MICE travellers is great because they arrive early and stay late and end up combining their conference with leisure.” When it comes to the legacy of events, Pincombe does not see it as a competition or a commercial strategy. Rather, they are complementary. When discerning the consequences of these conferences, they start by doing an initial impact analysis, looking at which is the best bid. “It is not just about calculating the dollars we think we can profit. We are really starting to think, ‘What is the social impact?’ ‘What is being left behind?’ So, the stronger our ecosystems are, the more significant activity there will be to create more jobs, investment, and a greater influence on people’s lives.”

Ottawa is occasionally referred to as the Silicon Valley of the North, and technology is the third-largest industry in the region. “We have a high concentration of highly qualified people in the fields of engineering and technology. When we look at the latter, especially with regard to autonomous vehicles, I highlight a truck testing facility called **Area X.O**, a research and development complex that aims to accelerate the commercial adoption of next-generation technology. We also have a huge experimental farm in our region run by the federal government, where tests are carried out on certain crops,” says Pincombe. In recent years, Ottawa Tourism has made a concerted effort to outline a DEI strategic plan aimed at tourism businesses that needed guidance for their conferences. “We have partnered with a college to launch an indigenous entrepreneurship programme (...) From a meetings and conventions perspective, what we have done is start to lift the veil on this story of reconciliation. We are on unceded land, a meeting place for Indigenous Peoples long before we built a convention centre. This year, we hosted the International **Indigenous Tourism Conference** in February, and we will be hosting many other indigenous conferences,” explains our Canadian interlocutor.



“*If there are no industries, we don't keep people. If people don't want to live here, there are no conferences. It's almost like a closed circle.*”



While Canada continues to welcome tens of thousands of immigrants – accounting for 210,865 new residents by May 2024 – these communities are becoming increasingly diverse, as are the needs and aspirations of their residents. Ottawa’s events also reflect this part of the population, and the DMO has endeavoured to create a MICE sector that respects this multiculturalism. One of these changes concerns women’s sport, with several competitions taking place in the city. “In the past, ice hockey events were quite dominant, but now cricket has gained prominence due to the thousands of people coming from countries where that sport is king. We have to constantly look at the make-up of our community and allow these newcomers to see themselves at these events. We will also be organising the **National Conference on Ending Homelessness** in October, as this is a global issue about affordable housing and the social degradation of high-risk groups.” As part of this indigenous liaison, the DMO has been working on how to link sporting events in the city with indigenous communities. “The **World Junior Ice Hockey Championship** is set to happen in 2025 and we will be working with the three large indigenous communities in our region. We also organised the Pacific Four Series of women’s rugby last year, launching a series of community events in Ottawa, which included **Let’s Play Rugby**, a programme developed to offer girls aged 13 to 17 the opportunity to play a non-contact version of the game.” As a result of this event’s community activity, more than 3,000 balls were delivered to 230 schools and 12 clubs, “we know that this can create a social impact in these communities,” she says. Other success stories include the **Masters Indigenous Games**, the **Wheelchair Basketball Championship** and the **OFSAA Wrestling Championship**. Moreover, Ottawa Tourism is currently carrying out an audit of the destination’s accessibility in order to produce a report file on solutions at this level. “When we hosted the **18th Deafblind International World Conference** at the **Shaw Centre** last year, we were essentially concerned that all standards were met. It turned out to be one of the best conferences ever because all the physical platforms and user solutions were integrated into the building,” concludes Pincombe.





International
Hospital
Federation

Sustainability at the Cutting Edge of the International Hospital Federation



As in any other industry, there comes a time when leaders realise that sustainability is a central issue of our times by creating bespoke support for their professionals to approach their work in this direction. The **Geneva Sustainability Centre (GSC)** is an integral part of the **International Hospital Federation (IHF)**, which has existed for over 90 years, serving the objectives and social mission of hospital leadership. The 48th World Hospital Congress to be held in Geneva will have sustainability as an integral part of its delivery to delegates, supporting around 1,500 hospital executives from more than 90 countries to lead the transformation to low-carbon, resilient and sustainable healthcare.

The IHF will collaborate with the **University Hospital of Geneva (HUG)** and the Canton of Geneva to host the annual event at the **Geneva International Conference Centre (CICG)** from 10-13 November 2025, a significant occasion for the organisation as the city is also home to its headquarters. HUG is an autonomous associate member of IHF and was vital in establishing the GSC by providing a global platform for hospitals to evolve as leaders for sustainability in their communities. In addition, the organising committee will also prioritise the delivery of an environmentally sustainable congress, which can serve as an example for reducing the carbon footprint of events as well as providing a positive experience for visitors.

We asked **Sonia Roschnik, Executive Director** of the GSC, how this will influence the programme as one of the core tracks designed by the scientific committee alongside concepts such as Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

How do you relate the objectives of environmental sustainability and green transition that you endorse with the GSC to the provision of hospital services?

It is interesting because when it comes to healthcare, this binomial between the environment and health fits perfectly. If we damage the environment through our operations, we are also damaging people's health. So, the best you can do on this topic is to be very integrated. If we start to reduce waste, it will be very positive for the health of the people around us. It is necessary to integrate the vulnerabilities of communities in order to plan for what will happen in the future, as well as to reduce the impact on the environment in different ways. By being aware of both these elements, it will be possible to create a more integrated and holistic approach, which in turn will be easier to put into practice rather than in separate silos.

How do you intend to equip your members and hospital leaders with the tools and skills needed to carry out this sustainable transformation?

We have been working on this process for just over two years. It is no longer enough to follow a checklist and tick the 'waste' or 'energy' boxes. This will require a much longer-term strategy to reduce resources. Sustainability needs to be integrated into all the decisions that are made within the hospital planning strategy. By way of example, one of the things we have done more recently, which I think helps hospitals in this direction, is to develop some accreditation standards with the **Joint Commission International** – meaning that it is now part and parcel of the fundamentals of hospital accreditation. Previously, these certificates were only about patient safety and quality of care, but now it brings sustainability into care and safety as well.

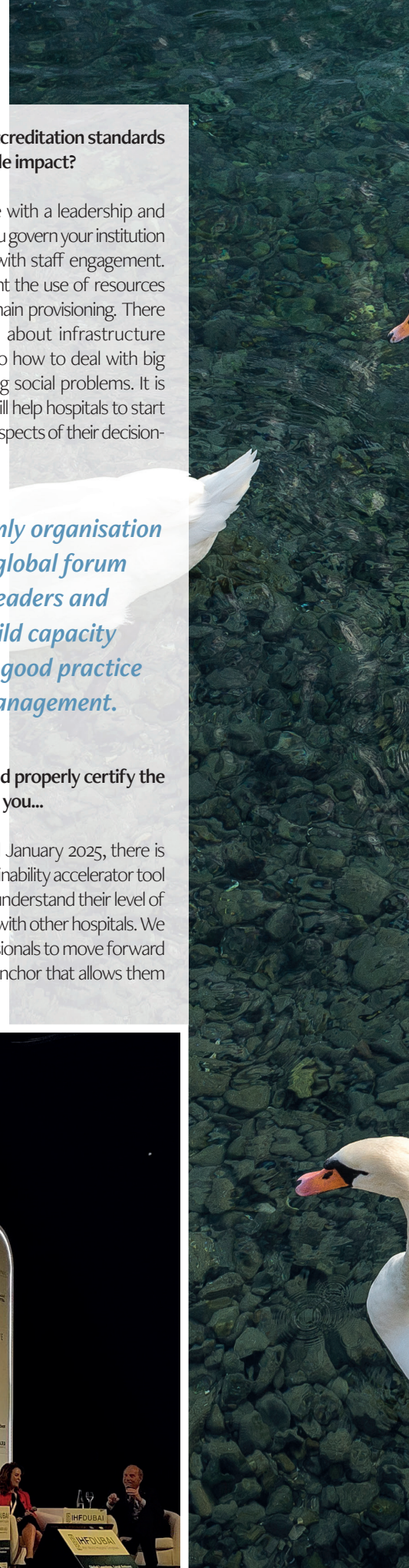
What are the main areas where accreditation standards can have a greater and more visible impact?

We try to be as holistic as possible with a leadership and governance component. The way you govern your institution has to include what you are doing with staff engagement. Obviously, it has to take into account the use of resources such as water, energy and supply chain provisioning. There is also another area that is more about infrastructure and resilience, which again refers to how to deal with big heatwaves, floods or other growing social problems. It is quite comprehensive and I hope it will help hospitals to start integrating these dimensions into all aspects of their decision-making processes.

“ *The IHF is the only organisation that provides a global forum specifically for leaders and executives to build capacity skills and foster good practice in healthcare management.* ”

So now you can rank, measure and properly certify the members who want to work with you...

We will not be ready to certify until January 2025, there is more to it than that. We have a sustainability accelerator tool that will offer hospitals the ability to understand their level of maturity and a basis for comparison with other hospitals. We hope that this will encourage professionals to move forward more quickly on this journey, as an anchor that allows them to see where





they are in the overall process. Based on this assessment, we will be able to offer guidelines and recommendations through the different phases of the strategic plan.

Do you think that hospitals also struggle with aspects of quality of life and resilience in the well-being of communities to improve health for all?

Often, when it comes to hospital care, we immediately think of emergencies or immediate interventions, leaving long-term planning for community vulnerabilities on the back burner. However, hospitals undoubtedly have a social role to play. If hospitals want to be the beacon of health for their communities, they have to start understanding and devoting time to the vulnerabilities of their populations and the impact that climate change may have on them. Because this will translate into the types of illnesses and care they will have to deal with. If we imagine, that in some colder seasons, the elderly are the most vulnerable, helping them to get good insulation in their homes is a good way of preventing them from catching pneumonia. The idea is that we should help everyone to stay healthy in their communities, playing a greater role in prevention. However, they often drown in the activity of the present, and it can be difficult to have a double hat.

“ We are not trying to turn hospital leaders into climate scientists, but if they are going to lead a sustainable hospital, it is necessary to understand the competencies they need to bring to the table. ”

How can the IHF Congress reduce the environmental footprint of all these delegates and create a more climate-friendly event?

The biggest carbon footprint usually corresponds to the participants’ journey to the destination. Although this can be offset by other measures during the event, you can’t change that fact. Alternatively, there are some things that can mitigate this burden, such as trying to book direct flights, choosing your route carefully or taking the opportunity to go on holiday at the same time. I think that people who choose to be responsible while travelling should consider donating their share of carbon to the ecological programmes that airlines partner with, for example.

On the ground, there are also a number of things that can be done, and we want to make sure that all our congresses take the following aspects into consideration. Catering, reusing materials or using sustainable and seasonal local food can make a big difference. On the other hand, making sure that everything is as digitally accessible as possible rather than relying solely on print. We try to improve all the venues we work with for the World Hospital Congress on their sustainability strategy. In the case of Geneva, the city is well positioned as it has been addressing these areas for a long time and remains keen to make progress in others. The city is ideal because everything is close by, the transport system is excellent, and Geneva hotels also offer a transport card.

Are measures such as the social inclusion of patients, better treatment in disadvantaged areas and fair and universal access to medical services also part of your Centre’s strategy?

Absolutely, because, in general, everything we do in terms of equality, diversity and social justice will only be jeopardised with environmental degradation. The most vulnerable populations are also those that will be most affected by certain diseases and epidemics. We saw this during COVID-19, when we had to identify the groups most exposed to the virus. One of the main challenges of the future will be to include all the needs of our different populations and communities. In my opinion, you cannot achieve environmental sustainability without social sustainability, i.e. without looking at climate justice. The major global catastrophes we see around the world will only get worse if we do not address the climate emergency. I think it was Sir Michael Marmot who said that the two always go hand in hand. I believe this is even more true on a global scale. With the International Federation of Hospitals, where we have members from Kenya, Indonesia, Japan and Europe, this data is going to become very evident. We have to make sure that this message is not just about the environment, but also about social equity.



Geneva

A global city where everyone wants to live

VIVIAN XU REPORTS

Throughout its history, Geneva has been a symbol of humanitarian values and a haven for those seeking sanctuary. Renowned for its commitment to peace and diplomacy, Geneva has shaped global humanitarian efforts since the founding of the **International Committee of the Red Cross** in 1863 and creation of the first international humanitarian treaty, the Geneva Convention of 1864. The city became a hub for international cooperation with the **League of Nations** and the **International Labour Organization** after World War II. Today, Geneva continues to uphold these values, hosting key organisations like **United Nations**, the **World Health Organization**, the **Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria** or the **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**. The city still stands as a neutral and welcoming place for people of all backgrounds.

HQ's Managing Director, Vivian Xu, recently visited the city to meet with the **Geneva Convention Bureau** and delve deeper into its strategy to maintain its global status as a premier destination for business events.

Looking beyond a destination's infrastructure and connectivity, one of the most important decision-making points is its key industry and academic pillars. Geneva serves as a major hub across multiple industries and sectors. The city boasts a robust medical and life sciences ecosystem anchored by the prestigious **Geneva University Hospitals (HUG)** and its specialised fields. In addition, Geneva plays a significant role in physics and particle accelerator research, notably through the renowned **CERN laboratory**. "We are working proactively to identify the key conferences that could fit and interest the destination and different scientific institutions such as CERN, University of Geneva (UNIGE), and HUG", said **Mégane Simeon, Bid & Communication Manager of Geneva Convention Bureau**.

Beyond science and medicine, Geneva is also a leader in sustainable finance, banking, international law, arbitration, and luxury sectors such as perfumery. Geneva is home to numerous international organisations that embody universalism, humanism, and international solidarity (see the list on the right). "The convention bureau is organised by clusters – medical or non-medical. Our strategy is based on the know-how hubs in Geneva, the Swiss precision, the central location in Europe, the high safety standards, and the multicultural environment created by all the international

societies in which DEI (Diversity, Equality, Inclusion) is practised every day", mentioned Mégane.

Moreover, the presence of innovation centres such as the **Campus Biotech complex** exemplifies Geneva's all-round approach to nurturing its key industrial sectors. Overall, the city leverages its world-class research facilities, international connections, and specialised expertise to maintain a dynamic and diverse economy.

The recent win of the **48th World Hospital Congress** in November 2025, which will be organised by the **International Hospital Federation (IHF)**, is a great example of how the collaboration opportunities in Geneva played an important role in the decision-making process.

HUG is Switzerland's leading university hospital group, globally renowned for their expertise in cutting-edge medical fields. These include cardiovascular disease, complex childhood and adolescent disorders, liver and pancreatic diseases, diabetes, musculoskeletal and sports medicine, genetic medicine, neurosciences, and oncology. The support of **Mr. Bertrand Levrat, former Director of HUG and member of the IHF Governing Council** since April 2021, was crucial in securing Geneva as the host city for this congress. *(Check out HQ's conversation with IHF on page 27)*



International organisations headquartered in Geneva: the United Nations, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Economic Forum (WEF), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

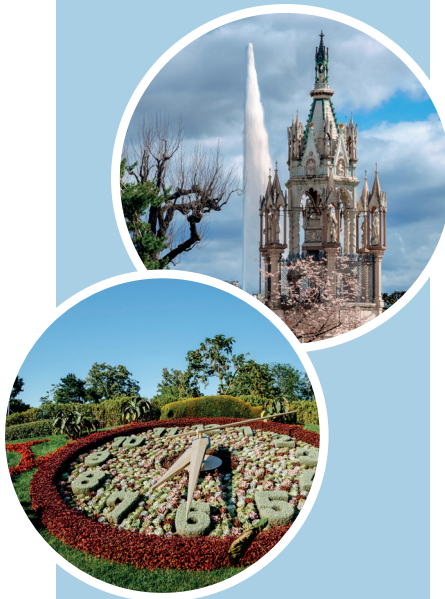
DEI Policies & Strategies

Since the 16th century, Geneva has developed its unique character as the centre of the Calvinist Reformation, becoming the ‘Protestant Rome’. Today, Geneva is home to more than 190 nationalities, with more than 40% of the population of non-Swiss nationality. This multicultural diversity is reflected in Geneva’s cuisine. The recently published *Geneva Food Guide* by **Sebastien Ripari**, a project supported by the **Geneva Tourism & Convention Foundation**, lists 60 premium restaurants, representing the city’s international culinary landscape.

The city and its people have long prioritised diversity and inclusion through proactive policies that promote social cohesion and sustainability. Their focus includes cultural diversity, gender equality, accessible services and tackling discrimination in all its forms. They also support minority communities and encourage the civic participation of all residents, ensuring a welcoming and inclusive environment for all.

At the local level, Geneva implements these priorities across municipal departments and services by raising public awareness, training staff, adapting programmes to be inclusive, collaborating with community associations, researching minority needs, and addressing discrimination complaints. Regionally and internationally, Geneva collaborates with organisations to share best practices and advocate for DEI. “Overall, we aim to cultivate a just, sustainable, and vibrant community where everyone feels welcome, respected, and able to participate fully in civic life. It strives to set an example by proactively championing DEI”, added Mégane.

Geneva is also a strong advocate for LGBTQIA+ rights, providing funding and support to numerous advocacy organisations. The city runs awareness-raising campaigns, ensures municipal services are inclusive of all families, trains staff, and promotes LGBTQIA+ representation. Noteworthy initiatives include annual campaigns for International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, preserving local LGBTQIA+ history, and the launch of programmes focused on transgender, intersex, and non-binary people. By creating an inclusive environment for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, Geneva aims to lead in the fight against discrimination.



HQ'S TOP PICKS

From the airport to the city centre: 7 minutes by train

Guests staying in any Geneva hotel can enjoy a complimentary digital **Transport Card**, offering free access to the city’s public transport network throughout their stay.

Hotel Royal ★★★★★

Just a 5-minute walk from the train station, Hotel Royal welcomes you to indulge in a unique atmosphere blending marble and gilt with serene silver-grey tones, offering the ultimate luxury experience.

Hilton Geneva Hotel and Conference Centre ★★★★★

Across from **Geneva Airport** and **Palexpo Exhibition Center**, the Hilton is located 15 minutes from Lake Geneva and the city centre. Equipped with 496 bright and spacious guestrooms, and over 3,000m² of event space. A complimentary airport shuttle and a transportation card are available.

Palexpo Exhibition Centre

From the two Geneva Convention Centres: CIGG and Palexpo, the latter is at a 10-minute walk or a 2-minute direct bus ride from Geneva International Airport. With 29 meeting rooms, 9 offices, and 7 exhibition halls spanning over 106,000m² of pillar-free exhibit space, Palexpo offers a highly flexible structure ideal for accommodating large-scale events under one roof. Additionally, Palexpo has Switzerland’s second-largest photovoltaic solar power station on its roof, with 15,000 solar panels. Equivalent to the consumption of 1,350 Geneva households per year. 2/3 of Palexpo’s electrical needs are produced by its solar panels.

Tuk Tuk tour in Geneva countryside & Wine Tasting

Explore Geneva’s picturesque countryside, a 20-minute e-TukTuk (from Welo.swiss) ride from the city centre. Wander through lush vineyards and savour the exquisite wines that Geneva is renowned for!

Meeting Trophy Switzerland

This June marked the 18th edition of the **Switzerland Meeting Trophy**, an annual event that brought together 60 international event professionals for a lively competition. Organised by the **Switzerland Convention & Incentive Bureau (SCIB)** – a division of **Switzerland Tourism** dedicated to MICE tourism – this year’s Trophy saw seven national teams from France, Germany, the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands, North America and the Nordic countries compete for the trophy. Team Belgium, led by **Myriam Winnepenninckx**, once again emerged victorious, securing their fifth win in the event’s history. Close on their heels was Team Netherlands in second place, with Germany and France sharing third place.

The three-day event took participants on an immersive journey through north-eastern Switzerland, departing from Zurich aboard the historic ‘**Red Arrow Churchill**’ train. This special train took the teams to Landquart before continuing on the scenic Rhaetian Railway to Davos. The itinerary included visits to Mount Rigi, Vitznau, Lucerne and Lake Sempach.

About the Red Arrow Churchill train

The train was named after Winston Churchill, who took it on a tour of Switzerland in 1946, visiting various Swiss cities, including Bern and Zurich. Today, the train can seat up to 100 guests with its tables of four.



Davos: The Alpine Health Resort :

Davos, the famous Alpine resort, is not only a haven for winter sports lovers, but also a global stage for world leaders. Every January, the world’s eyes turn to Davos for the prestigious **World Economic Forum (WEF)** at the **Davos Congress Centre**. With 12,000m² of versatile space and 34 meeting rooms, this state-of-the-art venue is designed to accommodate everything from intimate discussions to large-scale conferences for up to 5,000 participants. The Congress Centre’s modern facilities and adaptable configurations make it the perfect setting for the high-profile meetings that define the WEF.

In addition to its role in international diplomacy, Davos is also renowned for its pristine air quality, earning it the title of an ‘air spa’ or *Luftkurort* in German. This reputation for health and wellness



HQ'S TOP PICKS

Discovering the Charms of German-Speaking Switzerland

VIVIAN XU REPORTS

dates back over a century, making Davos a place for critical global dialogue, and also a destination for relaxation and recharging.

For those seeking adventure, Davos offers more than its historic charm. The region is home to one of Switzerland's largest ski resorts and hosts the international **Spengler Cup** ice hockey tournament every December. In addition, the hidden gem of **Rinerhorn** offers exciting night-time winter sports and unique activities, such as mountain scooter rides, with the chance of wonderful encounters with local wildlife.

A smooth drive from Davos took us to Goldau, where we boarded a cog railway to climb Mount Rigi, a breathtaking Alpine massif surrounded by three picturesque lakes. From Rigi, we took the cog railway down to Vitznau, then enjoyed a ferry ride across the lake to arrive in the charming city of Lucerne.

Lucerne: the Diamond of Central Switzerland

Lucerne, the capital of Canton Lucerne, is often described as the crown jewel of Central Switzerland. The city's well-preserved medieval Old Town, adorned with vibrant murals, tells tales of legendary folklore. Iconic landmarks such as the breathtaking Chapel Bridge, the dramatic Lion Monument and the 13th-century Water Tower add to Lucerne's timeless charm. Lucerne recently hosted the **International Peace Summit** at the **Bürgenstock Resort**, where 92 nations and eight international organisations met from 15-16 June to discuss the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war.



Grischa Hotel Davos: Conveniently located across from Davos Platz Railway Station, this hotel offers 93 guest rooms and suites, plus a large sun terrace perfect for inspiring seminars.

Berghotel Schatzalp (pictured left): A historic Swiss hotel built in 1900, this Art Nouveau gem features a 'Snow Beach Terrace' with breathtaking views of Davos.

Hotel Walserhuus Sertig (pictured below): Nestled in the enchanting Sertig Valley, this charming retreat with 11 guest rooms offers a true escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life.



Lok 7: A stylish alpine restaurant located at Rigi Staffel, easily accessible via the cog railway.

Hotel & Conference Centre Sempachersee: Located in Nottwil, this venue is operated by the Swiss Paraplegic Foundation, this venue offers an inclusive environment that fosters connections between pedestrians and wheelchair users alike.

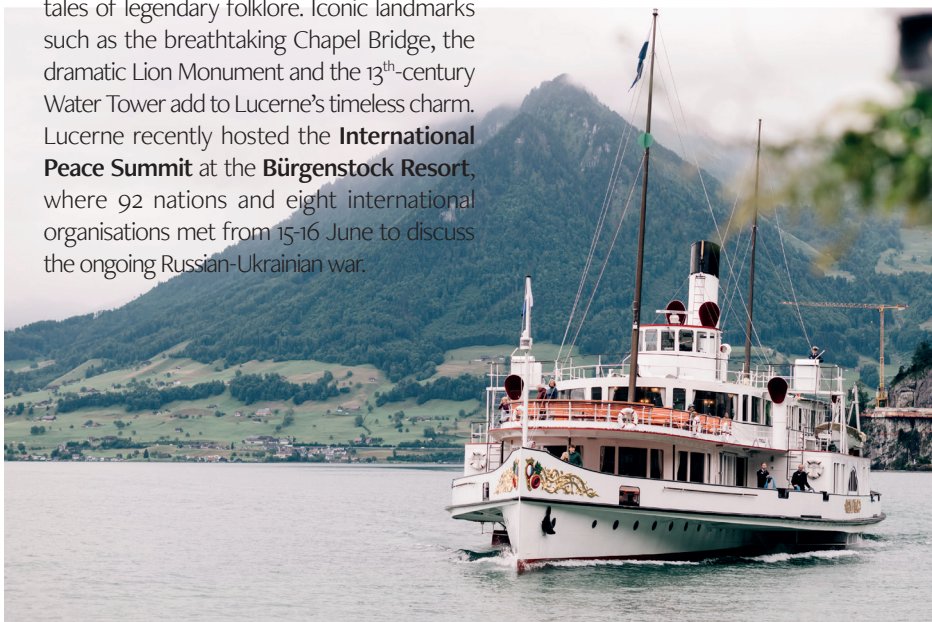
Swiss International Air Lines: The flag carrier of Switzerland, Swiss International Air Lines, is committed to achieving CO2-neutral aviation (net zero) by 2050, reflecting the nation's dedication to sustainability.

Swiss Travel Pass: A popular Rail Pass that offers unlimited travel on the Swiss Travel System network. Note: The Swiss Travel Pass is available exclusively to non-residents of Switzerland or Liechtenstein. More information at [MySwitzerland.com/rail](https://www.myswitzerland.com/rail)

Europcar: Europcar provides fast, convenient service, and competitive prices for car rental throughout Switzerland.

More information about the destinations, please visit: [switzerland.com/meetings](https://www.switzerland.com/meetings)

Photo credits: Mattias Nutt Photography



The **BESTIVAL Masterclass** was organised by the **visitBerlin Berlin Convention Office**, and took place from 3 to 5 July. An essential group of local and international event planners participated in the masterclass. The two-day programme combined with educational workshops and site inspections demonstrated how innovative event creations and the reimagining of congress formats can improve delegates' experience.

The BESTIVAL Masterclass made its debut under the theme of innovation. “The concept for our Masterclass series was developed at BESTIVAL 2023. Last year our Business Festival of the MICE and travel industry attracted over 1,000 participants from across Europe. More than 180 Berlin-based suppliers, as well as more than 60 speakers and performers, attended the third edition. That is where the idea of the BESTIVAL Masterclass was born,” **Marco Oelschlegel, director of the Berlin Convention Bureau**, told us. The masterclass consists of three exclusive series: Innovation, Sustainability (9-11 October), and Community (4-6 December). In addition, a group of 20 selected international participants got to know the city through these three perspectives. “At each BESTIVAL Masterclass, participants have the exclusive chance to make first-hand

experiences of the innovative spirit and future drive which is characteristic for the city of Berlin and which can positively impact business events taking place here”, added Marco.

“ *For each Masterclass, MICE experts can expect a deep-dive into specific themes including Innovation, Sustainability and Community, interactive workshops, inspiring encounters, up-close behind-the-scenes insights and much more.* ”



BESTIVAL Masterclass Berlin 2024

VIVIAN XU REPORTS



Hub27 was one of the key workshop venues during the masterclass, offering approximately 10,000 m² of column-free space bathed in natural daylight. This is complemented by an additional 5,000 m² of ancillary space, including 20 breakout rooms, offices, flexible registration and cloakroom counters, as well as a roof terrace designed for events, accommodating up to 200 guests. Throughout the venue's foyer, tactile paving guides visitors, and Braille is provided under each meeting room's name for improved accessibility.

“This inclusive atmosphere is a cornerstone of Berlin's approach, making everyone feel welcome, protected, and valued. Last year, we proudly demonstrated Berlin's ability to host large inclusive events by organising the

Special Olympics. During the preparation, we shared knowledge with our partners through preparatory courses and improved our practices, such as making our website accessible”, said Marco.

Speaking about DEI (Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion), dietary restriction is one of the aspects that should not be neglected. Dietary restrictions are caused by various reasons, such as health, lifestyle, religious beliefs, cultural traditions, or personal preferences. On the other hand, food allergies are on the rise worldwide and their dietary impacts are increasingly seen as a burden on global public health. The **World Health Organization** estimates that food allergies affect more than 10% of the general population worldwide. **Berlin Cuisine**,



HQ'S TOP PICKS

1. Intercontinental Berlin is spread across more than 6,200m² of event space, offering 55 different event spaces with a vast range of options. From an exclusive board meeting to a 2,500-delegate conference, an intimate private party to a banquet, Intercontinental Berlin is one of the largest MICE Hotels in the city. Hugos is located on the 14th floor with a 360° view of the city and the exclusive experience of a Michelin-starred restaurant in an exceptional setting.

2. Sustainability initiatives: Berlin has updated its **Sustainable Event Guidelines** to help planners organise eco-friendly events, including recommendations for reducing waste, using sustainable materials, and selecting certified sustainable suppliers. Scan the QR code on the left to check the guidelines.

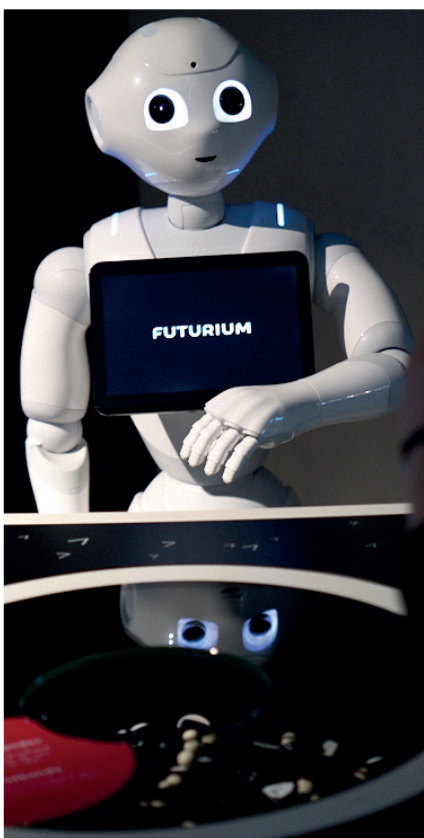
3. With over 377 rooms and suites, 18 conference rooms, the newly conceptualised BLEND Berlin kitchen and bar, and a modernised Fit and Spa Lounge, the **Pullman Berlin Schweizerhof** seamlessly blends avant-garde interior design with practical functionality. Ideally situated in the heart of Berlin, it offers easy access to major attractions such as the renowned shopping district Kurfürstendamm and the Zoologischer Garten, all just a short stroll away.

4. New international flight connections: Berlin is now served with increased frequency from cities like Copenhagen, Stockholm, Vienna, Innsbruck, Zurich, Birmingham, Toulouse, and Salerno. New direct flights are also available to North America and Asia, such as New York, Beijing, and Dubai.



an innovative catering company advances its leading role in inclusive and sustainable catering style. (For more on dietary restrictions see our interview on page 14)

On another note, **Estrel Berlin** is truly a star in the city. Europe's largest conference hotel, congress and entertainment centre continues to expand further. The brand new **Estrel Tower** next to the **Estrel Hotel** is estimated to open by the end of 2025. The complex offers 30,000m² of function space across 85 rooms for up to 15,000 delegates. Additionally, the new **Gasometer** venue on the **EUREF Campus** provides 1,100m² of event space and a Sky Bar with a 360-degree view of Berlin. **Heike Mahmoud**, former Chief Operating Officer (COO) of the CCH-Congress Center Hamburg has joined the Estrel as COO with immediate effect as of August 2024.





FIEXPO

Bidding Farewell to Panama as it Moves to Costa Rica

JESÚS GUERRERO CHACÓN REPORTS

Returning to **FIEXPO** after several years, having previously attended the event in Peru and Chile, I was eager to explore Panama and witness firsthand the growth and transformation of this premier Latin American event. With its strategic significance for associations in the region, Panama has been an exceptional host over the past three years. The 2024 edition, breaking all previous records, marked the grand finale in Panama before the event moves to Costa Rica in 2025 (9-12 June), promising new beginnings and continued evolution.

I flew in a few days before the event, and I took the opportunity to immerse myself in the lively city life and stunning natural landscapes of the city, like the Metropolitan Natural Park (the only urban natural park in Latin America). The **Intercontinental Hotel Panama**, where the *HQ* team stayed, offered breathtaking views of the Pacific Ocean and the skyline of the city, often referred to as the ‘Latin American Manhattan.’ Its location was perfect for strolling along the seven-kilometre-long Cinta Costera to Casco Viejo, offering beautiful ocean views and landscaped parks while avoiding city traffic. In addition, the hotel’s proximity to the main venue, the **Hilton**, provided an ideal setup for FIEXPO’s educational sessions in one of the city’s tallest buildings, with spectacular views of the bustling financial district and the waterfront.

PROMTUR’s efforts to promote Panama as a premier destination for international associations were evident from the very first day of FIEXPO. The opening day kicked off with the **ICCA Hackathon**, an innovative event that challenged teams to develop cutting-edge technology solutions for the meetings industry. The **Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE)**, the world’s largest technical professional organisation, highlighted the critical role of volunteers and the importance of working with convention bureaux (CVBs) and PCOs in event planning.

The **ICCA Latam Caribbean Chapter Meeting** highlighted the main challenges Latin American and Caribbean destinations and associations face, including the need for greater professionalisation, the implementation of advanced technology, and the establishment of clear governance structures. Issues such as financial sustainability, member engagement, and adapting to political changes were discussed as critical areas for development. The **Next Gen Summit**, moderated by **Santiago González of MICE Consulting**, was designed to show that age is not a barrier in the meetings industry. It provided a platform for students and young professionals to showcase their skills, share their insights and foster an environment of mentorship and innovation. While The **Convention Bureau Challenge** gathered professionals from destinations outside Latin America, such as the **Barcelona Convention Bureau**, and they shared their experiences with regional convention bureaux. Moderated by **Mind Meeting’s Mike Van Der Vijver**, this session highlighted key challenges for destinations and associations, including the need to separate convention and tourism strategies, the importance of sustainability and social responsibility, and the evolving expectations of attendees, particularly Gen Z. Discussions underscored the need for collaboration between CVBs, PCOs and municipalities, as well as the integration of technology and data-driven strategies to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of the meetings industry.





Turn the page to find out what FIEXPO's female leaders think about the importance of women in the meetings industry today, and read what Carolina Adano and Vivian Nardone have to say in our exclusive interview.

On day two, the **Connecting Minds** session transformed traditional meetings into transcendent experiences, teaching participants to design impactful events. The **International Association Forum** provided an exclusive space to connect international and regional associations and a unique space for knowledge sharing, best practices, and networking opportunities. The Forum brought together associations from diverse sectors, ranging from sports-related organisations to those in the medical or health-related industries, as well as technology and artificial intelligence associations. It focused on the essential role of associations in adult learning and social advancement. Key discussions centred on professionalising structures, governance, membership growth, member engagement and income diversification, stressing financial sustainability, operational efficiency and technological change.

The **11th Latam Political Forum**, held at the **Hotel Riu**, brought together Ministers, Governors, Tourism Directors and Meetings Industry Professionals from several countries to discuss the latest trends and policy strategies in the meetings industry. Among the key topics discussed were the impact of artificial intelligence and the multi-faceted value of professional events as a catalyst for innovation and growth. **Arnaldo Nardone, former Director of FIEXPO**, highlighted the importance of creating a sustainable and

socially inclusive industry that fosters economic development and job creation. The Forum also addressed the industry's commitment to the Net Zero Carbon Events initiative, which aims to significantly reduce carbon emissions and promote sustainability in the global events sector.

Days three and four of the event saw hosted buyers meet with exhibitors from different countries at the **Panama Convention Centre**. The educational sessions were also exceptional during the two days of the trade show. This year's FIEXPO's significant focus was technology, AI, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). On this topic, **Sherrif Karamat, CEO of PCMA**, addressed the critical issue of equal pay for women and the importance of modelling inclusive behaviour. Karamat insisted on the importance of integrating diversity and accessibility through PCMA's training and immersion experiences, and highlighted partnerships with organisations that focus on DEI to combat bias and ensure inclusivity. He stated that DEI is essential to creating a welcoming environment and urged leaders to take proactive steps towards effective adoption.

The **Women in Leadership** session was particularly impactful. Key speakers included **Carolina Adano, current Director of FIEXPO, Marcela Torres from PCMA, Elizabeth Tovar from Turenlaces del Caribe, Eugenia Powell from PROMTUR, Carolina Trejos from Costa Rica's Tourism Incentives, Charisse Slight from Grupo Mesarosa, and Andrea Valenzuela from SERNATUR**. They discussed their careers, the gender gap in leadership, work-family balance, and equity, emphasising women's empowerment and decision-making roles in the meetings industry. They also provided tips for the next generation: pursuing education, believing in oneself, seeking mentors, sharing ideas, finding passion, and fostering empathy without guilt.

Regarding technology and AI, various panellists explored innovative uses in the events industry. **Veemal Gundagin, CEO of Singapore-based Gevme**, discussed generative AI's potential in text, music, chatbot, and video creation. Gundagin stressed that organisations must adapt to avoid obsolescence, using AI for data management, idea generation, personalised experiences, data analysis, trend research, and improving knowledge accessibility. **Dahlia El Gazzar, from the Boston-based DahliaAgency**, focused on technology's role in enhancing delegate experiences. She emphasised understanding attendees' intentions and outcomes, using technology for personalised experiences, AI matchmaking, content access, engagement, and data analytics. **Álvaro Rojas, General Director of the Costa Rica Convention Centre**, highlighted the evolution of leadership in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. He emphasised the need for digitally savvy leaders who understand technology. Rojas outlined five principles for AI-human collaboration: reimagining business processes, encouraging employee participation, guiding AI strategies, responsible data collection, and effective data analysis. He stressed that real transformation comes from integrating technology and data to improve management and reduce frustration.

FIEXPO 2024, as highlighted by **founder Arnaldo Nardone** and audited by the **Global Association of the Exhibition Industry**, set records with 734 exhibitors from 70 destinations and 12,803 business meetings. The event attracted 1,133 hosted buyers and visitors, generating \$872 million in business discussions and \$10 million in investments in Panama City, underscoring FIEXPO's global significance. I was impressed by its focus on education, innovation, and collaboration. The region's potential as a key global meetings industry player is evident. Latin America is undoubtedly on the rise.



In this issue of *HQ*, we catch up with two influential women leaders in the Latin American Meetings Industry – **Carolina Adano** (pictured above), **Director of FIEXPO Exhibitions Group, Director of Eventos Latinoamericanos and Treasurer of COCAL** (the Latin American Association of the Meetings Industry), and **Vivian Nardone** (pictured below), **CEO of FIEXPO Exhibitions Group, Director of MICE Consulting and Events Director of SITE South America**. They share their personal journeys, challenges and insights into advancing the role of women in the MICE sector, offering a fresh look at the progress and obstacles faced by women in leadership roles.

BREAKING BARRIERS

Can you share your personal journey to becoming a leader in the MICE industry?

Carolina Adano (CA): My first encounter with the MICE industry was working at my father’s DMC company during the summer holidays. Before starting university, I attended a training seminar on congresses and events, which was a turning point in my life. It was there I met Sergio Baritussio, who would become my husband, and I began working at a DMC, and then at a PCO. A few years later, I founded my own PCO company. In 2007, when Sergio and Arnaldo Nardone decided to create a show for the meetings industry in Latin America, they invited me to lead the team and develop **FIEXPO Latin America**. Although my start in this industry was somewhat accidental, today, I could not see myself doing anything else. This industry enriches you both in knowledge and personal contacts, and I am deeply proud of the economic impact on destinations and the legacy we create.

Vivian Nardone (VN): My journey in the MICE industry began over 25 years ago when **Radisson Hotels** introduced its first convention centre in my country. I was among the early professionals who received training in events and conferences through their programmes.

My university studies allowed me to gain experience with a local PCO, which was pivotal. I later became Country Manager for an internationally recognised PCO, representing their brand as they entered Latin America. In 2017, I joined FIEXPO Exhibitions, where I currently serve as CEO. This role has expanded my expertise and allowed me to contribute more broadly to the industry. I am proud of the path I chose, which has connected me with global leaders and diverse cultures while highlighting the tangible and intangible benefits this industry offers.

What are some of the key challenges and barriers that women in Latin America face today in achieving leadership positions, especially in the MICE industry?

CA: Persistent gender biases and stereotypes often result in women being underestimated or overlooked for leadership roles. One of the most significant barriers is the demanding nature of the MICE industry, which requires significant time and travel, making it difficult for women to balance work and family life. Cultural expectations often place additional burdens on women, reinforcing these challenges.

Women Leading the Way in Latin America’s Meetings Industry

JESÚS GUERRERO CHACÓN REPORTS



VN: Women in the MICE industry face entrenched cultural norms and gender stereotypes that limit their opportunities. Balancing work and personal responsibilities is another significant hurdle, compounded by the lack of female role models in leadership positions. Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort by individuals and organisations to promote equality and create inclusive environments. As current leaders, we also have a responsibility to be visible and motivate other women to succeed.

At FIEXPO 2024, the experts who took part in the Women in Leadership panel discussed the importance of creating a network that can support and help one progress in their career. How important has mentorship from other female and male leaders been in helping women advance in the MICE industry in Latin America?

CA: Mentorship from both female and male leaders is crucial in helping women advance in the MICE industry. Mentors, regardless of gender, can introduce women to key industry contacts, opening doors to opportunities and collaborations that might otherwise be inaccessible. They also share their experiences and expertise, helping women develop the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed.

VN: I completely agree with Carolina. Mentorship from both female and male leaders is indeed vital. Female mentors, in particular, offer relatable guidance, helping emerging talent navigate industry complexities, while male mentors bring diverse perspectives and advocate for gender inclusivity. These relationships are transformative, providing crucial support, expanding professional networks, and empowering women to overcome challenges and achieve their career goals.

What can men do to better support and promote women’s leadership?

CA: Men can significantly support women’s leadership by promoting an inclusive culture that values diverse perspectives and recognises women’s contributions. They can also encourage policies and practices that support work-life balance, such as flexible working hours, remote work options, and parental leave.

VN: Men can also support and promote women’s leadership by becoming active allies. This includes championing gender inclusivity, mentoring and sponsoring women, and challenging gender bias. Advocating for flexible work arrangements and parental leave policies that benefit everyone, not just women, can also contribute to a more inclusive and dynamic workplace.

What cultural changes do you see that could enable more women to reach the top?

CA: Several cultural changes and challenging stereotypes about gender roles in both

professional and personal settings are crucial. We need to promote the idea that leadership is not gender-specific and ensure that both men and women can excel in leadership roles. A commitment to pay equity by regularly reviewing and addressing gender pay gaps within organisations is also essential.

VN: Embracing gender equality in leadership is essential, as various international studies show that companies with greater gender diversity in their leadership teams are more likely to have above-average profitability. Supporting work-life integration through flexible arrangements is also crucial, with a 2018 *Harvard Business Review* study highlighting that such policies enable women to achieve a better balance and make leadership roles more accessible. Actively challenging unconscious bias is essential, and mentorship and sponsorship have been shown to be effective. Greater transparency in leadership promotion and advancement practices is strongly recommended, ensuring fair performance reviews and clearer paths to leadership.

What advice would you give to young women starting out in the MICE industry in Latin America who aspire to become leaders one day?

VN: Based on my personal experience, my advice to young women starting out in the MICE industry in Latin America who aspire to become leaders is to seek professional training and mentorship. Connecting with experienced professionals can provide valuable guidance, support and learning opportunities. Proactivity in personal development is essential; we must commit to working on our skills, including leadership and interpersonal communication, which are critical to advancing in this industry. It is important to face challenges with perseverance and a positive attitude, never giving up, as resilience can make a significant difference. It is also important to advocate for your own interests and those of others, always promoting diversity, equity and inclusivity.



HQ INSIGHTS



ASSOCIATION
& P CO



The Many **Aspects** of **Inclusiveness**



Inclusiveness is increasingly becoming a key feature of any successful event. At the same time, the notion of inclusiveness can mean different things to different stakeholders. Convention centres need to have a clear view on these different viewpoints in order to make sure they meet the different requirements. A key success factor for doing so is to make sure the stakeholders are involved from the start of the journey.

AUTHOR: SVEN BOSSU, CEO, AIPC

On 5 June 2024, Calgary's **BMO Centre** at Stampede Park celebrated the grand opening of its 565,000-square-foot expansion, designed by **Stantec**, **Populous** and **S2 Architecture**. The design work started in 2019, literally on the back of a napkin and resulted in a great piece of architecture, pushing the boundaries of convention design. Equally important was the fact that from day one, a non-architect was involved: **Darby Lee Young, Founder and Principal of Level Playing Field**, an accessibility consulting agency. As a result, physical accessibility was incorporated into every part of the design. As **Adam Paulitsch** from Populous said during a session on the topic at the **2024 AIPC Annual Conference**: "Having Darby on board from day one made all the difference."

Darby shared some of her personal experiences with convention centres during the **2023 AIPC Operations Summit**, and while she brought examples of things which did not work with a lot of humour – e.g., pictures of push buttons being installed at a height which cannot be reached by wheelchair users – it clearly demonstrated the need to have the stakeholders involved when this type of investment is done.

Physical accessibility – not only for wheelchair users but also for people with limited sight, hearing, etc. – is however just one aspect of making a convention centre inclusive.

As **Ross Steel, CEO of the Te Pau Christchurch Convention Centre** (New Zealand), mentioned during the same session at the annual conference: it is also important to include local communities in the work being done by convention centres. The Te Pae Christchurch has been designed as Ōtautahi Christchurch's 'gathering

place'. A key part of the regeneration of the city, the Government's investment in Te Pae Christchurch is set to act as a catalyst – not only for the growth and development of the city, but as a way of building lasting social, cultural and economic connections between the region and the world. Local communities should indeed feel involved and connected with the convention centres and the events taking place, resulting in higher engagement and unique/local experiences for delegates.

A third element to be considered from a convention centre point of view is the need for individualised event journeys at the level of the participant. While this should of course be part of the event design, it will also have an impact on the use of the convention centre. For example: a delegate attending a medical conference will of course attend sessions and visit the exhibition, but might also feel the need to step out of the conference for a moment and have some 'me-time'. This can be achieved by creating small areas throughout the convention centre which allows them to do so. An excellent example is the **Montréal Convention Centre**, which has thematic spaces showcasing the **Quebec Tourism** experience. It is a set of immersive, informal spaces where people can sit, relax and network, varying from an *après-ski* station to a virtual cycling lane.

As you can see from the examples above, inclusivity can mean a lot of things and it is important to keep this in mind when addressing the topic at the level of the convention centre. It is not only about accessibility but making sure that all who enter the centre feel welcomed in an environment which respects their needs and values, something which can only be achieved by partnering with these communities from the very start.

DEI in International Not-for-profit Associations: The **Impact** and **Rationalism** Behind It



AUTHOR: MARTIN BOYLE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER AT IAPCO

“ *Diversity is being invited to the party, inclusion is being asked to dance.* ”

This quote by **Verna Myers**, a prominent advocate for diversity and inclusion, highlights the difference between simply having a diverse group and ensuring that everyone feels valued and engaged.

In the modern era, the principles of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI or DEI or even DEIB – Diversity Equity Inclusion and Belonging, depending on where you are based) have become critical components of organisational success across all sectors. For international non-profit associations, these values are not just a matter of ethics but a foundational element of their mission to create positive social change.

As organisations dedicated to the public good, most not-for-profit associations (NFP), like the organisation I represent, **IAPCO**, have a unique responsibility to model the principles of DEI in our internal practices, partnerships and the communities we serve.

A 2020 survey by the **Nonprofit HR** firm found that about 52% of NFPs in the US and Canada had a formal DEI policy in place. From a global perspective, the **World Economic Forum** and **Deloitte**, highlighted in 2021 that DEI is increasingly becoming a priority for international organisations, including NFPs. There appears to be a growing number that are recognising the importance of DEI with larger international NFPs, particularly those involved in advocacy, human rights and international development. They are more likely to have formal DEI policies compared to smaller or more locally-focused organisations.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion are more than just buzzwords; they are essential to the effectiveness and integrity of associations, particularly those operating on an international scale.

Whilst the importance of DEI is clear for most, international associations often face significant challenges in fully integrating these principles into their operations. Operating across multiple countries means navigating a wide range of cultural norms and expectations regarding diversity and inclusion. What is considered inclusive in one context may not be in another.

Despite the pressures and challenges, as global representative bodies with membership constituents from all backgrounds, we must be sensitive to differences while maintaining a consistent commitment to DEI that aligns to our own ‘controllable practices’.

Developing a clear framework that outlines your commitment to DEI principles should include definitions of equity, diversity and inclusion as they apply to your organisations’ community and metrics of measurement of success should also be considered.

At IAPCO, we established a DEI & Sustainability Committee formed of leaders, trainers and volunteers from all levels across our global community. The objective was to firstly, create our policy then to continually review policies and practices in order to recommend improvements and additional measurements along the way. It is a constant work in progress.

As industry leaders, we must not only endorse the values but also model them in our own behaviour and decision-making. The IAPCO Council (our Board) of nine industry heads from within our membership cover Asia, Europe and LATAM regions and ensure the respective voices of their communities are heard across discussions and decisions.

Regular training and education is crucial for building awareness and understanding of DEI issues among staff, volunteers, and stakeholders. We are committed, through the training programmes that IAPCO provides, whether through our **IAPCO EDGE Seminars**, our own **Annual Meeting and General Assembly** or through our online educational platform called **webEDGE**, that we strive to cover topics such as unconscious bias, cultural competency, and inclusive communication.

Given the very nature of our global outreach, we engage with the communities we serve in as meaningful and inclusive a manner as is feasible to do so. This involves not only listening to the needs and concerns of these members and communities but also actively involving them in the design and implementation of programmes.

At IAPCO, our faculty of professionals that deliver our educational programmes, is formed from our membership base across the 180 global offices representing 45 countries, each selected on their specific subject matter expertise.

Do we ever fall short of our own expectations and objectives? Yes, sometimes.

Do we recognise this and strive to improve? Absolutely.

While challenges exist, with strong leadership, clear strategies and a commitment to continuous improvement, we can successfully integrate DEI into all aspects of our operations.

Through a commitment to DEI, whether at the very start of the journey in preparing your policies and procedures or well into delivering and reviewing your existing objectives and results. As NFP association leaders and influencers we can better serve our communities, foster innovation and create a more just and equitable world.

I leave you with the following final thought.

“ *Inclusion is not bringing people into what already exists; it is making a new space, a better space for everyone.* ”

Quote by Ghanaian-born George Sefa Dei, Professor of Social Justice Education & Director of the Centre for Integrative Anti-Racism Studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.

IAPCO is a global not-for-profit membership organisation whose mission is to raise the standards of service amongst its members and other sectors of the meetings and events industry by means of continuing education, interaction with other professionals and research. IAPCO today represents 138 accredited businesses of professional congress organisers in 40 countries. IAPCO membership is achieved through the demonstration of a continual high level of service delivery and is retained through annual quality checks and reviews by the IAPCO Quality Committee.





First created in Paris in 2002, **Eurosif** – the **European Sustainable Investment Forum** – is a Brussels-based membership organisation with a mission to promote sustainable development through financial markets. Over the last 22 years, they have established themselves as the leading pan-European association promoting sustainable finance at the European level. Eurosif's membership is comprised of Europe-based national Sustainable Investment Fora (SIFs), most of which have diverse memberships themselves including asset managers, institutional investors, index providers and ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) research and analytics providers.

The **Eurosif Community of Practice:** How to Build **Sustainable Social Investments?**

One of the main conclusions of their **JEDI workstream (Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion)** is that there is a strong appetite among the investor community to implement improved practices, data collection and JEDI investment, but there is also a lack of information to follow. The Eurosif Community of Practice has been successful in addressing these issues by emphasising the usefulness of exchanging best practices and concrete ideas to tackle these challenges. Eurosif and its members are committed to the growth and integrity of significant sustainable investment flows, supporting European policymakers in accelerating a just transition and a fully transparent investment market. *HQ* spoke to **Aleksandra Palinska, Executive Director of Eurosif**, about this JEDI workstream.

How did you imagine these communities of practice based on the “Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion” quadrilateral?

Although the importance of a just transition is recognised, little has been done to date in practical terms to address the growing inequalities in societies, wealth, education and insufficient diversity across companies, especially at management and board levels. Despite the growing prominence of impact investments, including those focused on social issues, there is little awareness of how to promote (JEDI) through investments.

Finance is a powerful lever for positive change in the economy, which applies to both social justice and the environment. Based on discussions with investors, we realise that they are willing to incorporate JEDI considerations, but face challenges regarding the acquisition and availability of data and also need guidance regarding practical implementation. It is very useful to have a space where you can exchange ideas and best practices with peers, which is what the Eurosif community of practice has offered. We have also invited various experts to our Community of Practice debates, sharing knowledge

and ideas to help investors dismantle the mechanisms that drive social inequality.

When it comes to climate investment funds, how do you make the case that racial and gender diversity, equal opportunities and social impact can contribute to the original goal of investors and industry members?

Besides the moral argument, marginalised communities are disproportionately impacted by the effects of climate change, a point made by our podcast guest **Kim-Smouter Umans, Director of the European Network against Racism**. As of 2015, the G8 nations were responsible for 85% of global excess CO₂ emissions. High-income countries, therefore, bear a greater degree of responsibility for climate damage. Research by the **Climate Finance Fund** has proven the correlation between DEI efforts and the overall sustainability performance of portfolio companies. Diverse teams also build better, more resilient and profitable businesses. As a result, there is a business case and a moral case for investing in DEI principles.

Eurosif's JEDI Community of Practice has sought to develop a wider understanding of the notion of climate justice. By investing through the JEDI lens and encouraging improved diversity at different levels of companies, a higher degree of consideration is given to marginalised communities to ensure a just transition to a more sustainable economy. Ultimately, these issues are symbiotic: climate change increases social inequalities, while efforts to alleviate them tend to bridge the gap.

During the first phase of the project, the communities of practice identified obstacles such as the difficult access to DEI-related data and the legal risks of collecting data. What conclusions did you reach?

The challenge is the lack of ESG data available on everything beyond gender diversity, such as age, ethnicity, social background, disability, etc. The misconception is that GDPR actively prohibits the collection of this data, which is not the case. Article 9 of GDPR effectively allows the collection of special categories of data when the person has given explicit consent. This encompasses DEI data collection, which can, in fact, be done on the basis of employees' consent, ensuring that surveys are anonymous. GDPR also allows EU Member States to implement a specific basis for measuring diversity initiatives in their local laws. However, Member States have not used this prerogative.

To resolve this issue, anti-discrimination organisations encourage the collection of DEI data, as long as it is done in accordance with human rights. One of the main principles is to let people identify themselves with their preferred ethnic backgrounds. Setting the correct categories is also important, since failing to do so can influence the entire data collection process. However, this is difficult in some EU member states like France, where local law does not allow the categorisation of people based on their race/ethnicity. In these cases, other data will need to be collected to build up a picture of an organisation's diversity, such as nationality, place of birth, mother tongue, etc.

The **Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive** and **European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS)** constituted a great opportunity to improve the availability of DEI disclosures. Unfortunately, these disclosures did not

make it into the final version of the ESRS. This is something to consider during a review of these standards.

Is there any possibility of including JEDI-aligned social bonds to revert these proceeds to activities sensitive to climate justice or social impact?

The **EU Green Bond Standard (EU GB)** is aimed at financing projects that contribute to environmental sustainability. However, this standard has already been adopted, therefore, from a legislative standpoint, there is no possibility to include any criteria connected with JEDI at the moment. That said, the new EU legislative mandate constitutes a great opportunity to consider measures that can support a just transition to sustainable growth. Currently there is a clear gap in the EU sustainable finance framework with regard to defining and standardising socially sustainable investments. This could be addressed by creating a social taxonomy or establishing a set of criteria defining social investments in the context of the review of the **Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation**, expected in 2025.

Finally, how do you see the current associative landscape with regard to social justice and DEI from a management and leadership perspective?

As a starting point, associations need to collect the appropriate data from their employees, which, as already mentioned, is permitted by the GDPR and remains possible even in countries where laws prohibit certain terms or categories. In our podcast episode with **Prof. Lokke Moerel**, she explained that the GDPR actually establishes the proper legal conditions to collect this data, in line with data minimisation, privacy-by-design and security. This gives associations a picture of their own DEI status and will help identify areas for improvement, acting as a springboard for internal analysis as to why certain groups are under- or over-represented, and subsequently developing measures and goals to address this. Transparency on such matters is a starting point for making management decisions to enhance diversity. What helps is raising awareness of the benefits of diversity in organisations, which can render better results. Naturally, advancing social justice can also go beyond the operations themselves and become part of one's external political advocacy.





Embracing **Wellness** and **Inclusivity**: How Cities and DMOs are **Redefining Success**

In today's rapidly evolving socio-economic landscape, the importance of DEI in encouraging wellness within workplaces and communities has become increasingly clear. Wellness and inclusivity are promoted through community engagement and inclusive event planning, Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) have a key role in leading these initiatives, states the recent report *Redefining Success: How DMOs Can Drive Social & Community Well-Being* by **City Destinations Alliance** in collaboration with **TOPOSOPHY**.

Community Engagement and Ownership

One of the themes of the report is the importance of instilling a sense of ownership among residents. Engaging local communities in tourism planning and decision-making processes is crucial for fostering inclusivity and ensuring that tourism development aligns with the needs and values of the community.

Berlin's Tourism Citizens' Advisory Council serves as a prime example of this approach. This initiative includes residents in the decision-making process, ensuring their voices are heard and their concerns addressed.

The council aims to encourage sustainable and community-aligned tourism by facilitating direct communication between Berliners and tourism stakeholders. It helps generate new ideas and initiatives to ensure tourism benefits the city and its residents. This initiative promotes inclusivity and local engagement at the planning stage, ensuring that Berlin's tourism industry reflects and respects the diverse perspectives of its residents. It is a model of community ownership and active participation in city development.

Inclusive Event Planning

The meetings and events industry has a unique opportunity to model inclusivity and wellness. Events should be designed to be accessible to all, offering diverse and inclusive experiences. Creating an inclusive meetings environment involves proactive measures such as accessible venue selection, diverse speaker panels, and inclusive networking opportunities.

The accessibility efforts by Barcelona demonstrate how improving city infrastructure and services can ensure

inclusivity for all visitors. The city offers accessible public transportation, including buses and metro stations equipped with elevators and ramps. Many tourist attractions, such as Sagrada Família and Park Güell, have been adapted for wheelchair users. Additionally, Barcelona provides tactile models of famous landmarks and audio guides, enhancing mobility for visually impaired visitors. Some museums and attractions also offer sensory-friendly hours and tailored information for those with cognitive impairments.

The **Accessible Barcelona App** offers detailed information on accessible routes, attractions, accommodations, and services, catering to wheelchair users, blind and visually impaired individuals, and those with cognitive impairments. The website also provides tips and detailed information on accessible attractions, hotels, restaurants, and shopping districts, ensuring that all visitors can enjoy the city without barriers.

Promoting Local Culture and Community

Cities worldwide are recognising the importance of promoting wellness and inclusivity to attract visitors and enhance resident satisfaction. Campaigns that encourage residents to explore local cultural institutions cultivate a sense of community and belonging.

For instance, Amsterdam's **1+1 Free to Culture** campaign is aimed specifically at residents, encouraging them to explore local cultural institutions during off-peak months by offering a 'buy one, get one free' ticket deal throughout November. The campaign involves 107 cultural institutions across all city districts, including well-known venues like the Rijksmuseum and Van Gogh Museum, as well as lesser-known locations. It aims to boost local engagement with cultural assets, especially among new audiences and those with limited

access due to budget constraints. It highlights Amsterdam's diverse cultural offerings and promotes cultural exploration among residents helping build stronger connections between residents and cultural institutions, enhancing overall community well-being.

Uncovering Hidden Gems: Promoting Diversity in Lesser-Known Urban Areas

Cities around the world are increasingly striving to attract visitors to their lesser-known neighbourhoods, which offer unique cultural and social landscapes that can appeal to a diverse range of tourists. The **Vienna Tourist Board's Grätzel Personality Test**, a unique online quiz of six questions which recommends neighbourhoods based on personal preferences, showcases the city's diversity and encourages exploration beyond traditional tourist areas. Additional details about each neighbourhood are available, providing users with deeper insights into local attractions and events. This initiative not only promotes less-visited areas but also ensures that the benefits of tourism are spread more evenly across the city.



London & Partners (L&P) have recently taken on the remit of **Grow London Local**, which provides free support to help small businesses, many of which are part of the local tourism and hospitality community, grow and thrive. L&P's objective is to encourage visitors to explore more of the city, thereby supporting local businesses. By helping new areas in London attract local visitors, the aim is to build on the existing community rather than replace it.

The Rise of Bleisure

The blending of business and leisure travel, or 'bleisure,' is on the rise, offering opportunities for destinations to cater to the needs of modern travellers seeking a balance between work and relaxation. By promoting wellness amenities and inclusive experiences, cities can attract bleisure travellers looking for enriching and diverse environments. This also feeds into sustainable travel choices where travellers are looking to make the most of that one journey.

Cities like Helsinki are capitalising on this trend by offering unique experiences that cater to both business and leisure travellers. Helsinki's Design District is a vibrant area in the city's centre, known for its concentration of creative businesses, including design and antique shops, fashion stores, museums, art galleries, restaurants, and showrooms. It attracts both residents and visitors, contributing to Helsinki's reputation as a city of design. Revitalised with the help of local artists and creatives, it provides an enriching environment for bleisure travellers who wish to explore the city's cultural heritage while attending business meetings.

Embracing wellness and inclusivity in the meetings and events industry, as well as in broader tourism strategies, is essential for creating environments where all individuals feel welcome and valued. By learning from the innovative approaches highlighted in the report, such as inclusive decision-making, community engagement, and promoting local culture, cities and DMOs can drive positive change and foster a more inclusive and diverse industry. The examples from Berlin, London, Barcelona, Amsterdam, Vienna, and Helsinki demonstrate that with thoughtful planning and community involvement, destinations can redefine success to include the well-being and inclusivity of all stakeholders.

The report is available for download on CityDestinations Alliance's website.

The report takes a deeper dive into meaningful KPI design with practical applications and real-world case study examples to support and empower DMOs to broaden their positive influence, measure their social impact and communicate their value contribution for the neighbourhoods, cities and regions they serve.

The report outlines eight Impact Themes with four KPI examples and four practical actions deliverable for each. Designed to be a comprehensive yet not exhaustive list, this report is intended as inspiration for DMOs to reframe their role through the purpose-driven lens of social and community well-being. An overview of measurement methodologies highlights the value of using a mix of traditional and emerging technologies with guidance on how DMOs can capture their impact by effectively communicating their positive contribution for people and for places.



Paying Attention to Our **Most Important Assets** – and a Big Part of our **Value Proposition** to Our Members

We in the association management profession often get into discussions about how important it is to identify the *value* of membership to our prospects, to be sure to constantly 'deliver *value* to our members for their ongoing support' (retention), and to recognise our volunteers 'as our most *valuable assets*'. All good discussions to have, all important perspectives to remember.

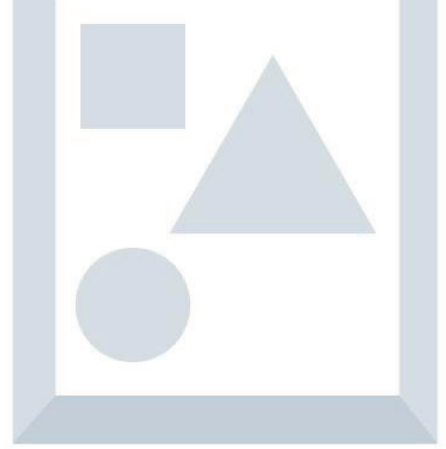
But are all those statements accurate?

I would agree with the first two: the value proposition and delivering ongoing value to our members are top-of-the-line priorities.

I think we need to delve just a little deeper beyond that third statement. There needs to be a fourth component to this value discussion. And this one is actually just as easy to quantify as the results of your recruitment campaigns and your retention efforts. In fact, you can calculate this value with a quick look at your association's budget.

Here is how you do that:

1. Look at your budget;
2. Not counting your meetings (which are offset by income), what is your organisation's single biggest expense this year?
3. Answer: You. You and your fellow staffers (your salaries, your benefits, your travel expenses, etc.)

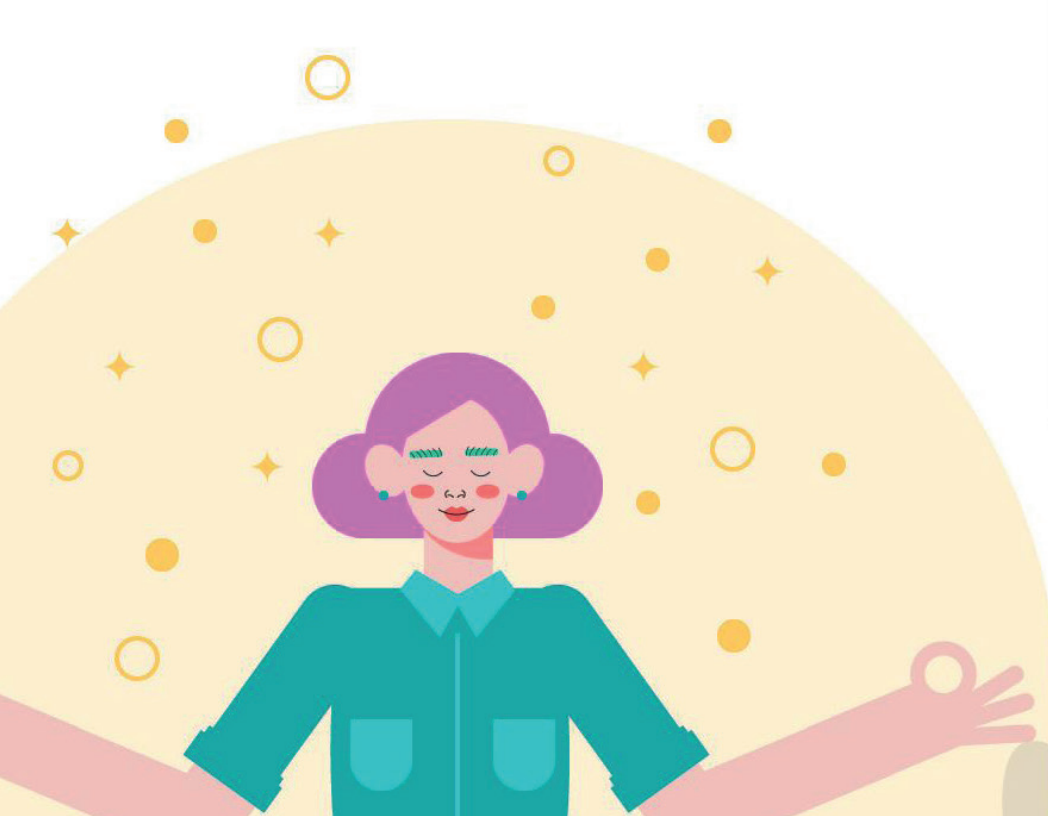


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Levin, CAE, CSP has more than 20 years of experience as an association executive and is also an internationally-known speaker and consultant to the nonprofit and association community. He currently serves as Executive Vice President of the Chain Link Fence Manufacturers Institute, an international trade association, and as President of B.A.I., Inc., his speaking and consulting firm.



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We – the organisation’s staff – are almost always the single biggest dues investment our members make each year. That being the case, we need to make sure we do not just employ these valuable people, but that we show them that we care about their well-being, as well as their work.

This means going beyond those ‘Staff Recognition’ programmes and events that we hold from time to time (note: I am not saying to not do those recognition programmes. I LOVE those programmes. I am saying that they are just one thing we need to do to protect one of our members’ most valuable investments.)

Here are some things you can do to enhance your staff’s belief that their employer understands that there is more to a staff position in your organisation than just a paycheck and benefits:

1. Promote a healthy – and safe – work environment:

Even in a time when many employees are working only periodically in the office, we still need to stay on guard to give them a sense of safety. It is sad to say, but in the United States (and other countries), organisations are providing employees with training on what to do in the event of a robbery, hostage situation, or, in the worst-case scenario, an active shooter.

Other scenarios are less threatening, yet still frightening, in the workplace. Is there someone on duty during all office hours who is trained in CPR and using defibrillators? Does everyone know who these people

are? Are all employees given some level of training in basic first aid? Who in the office knows exactly who to call for a problem in the building with a power outage or security breach?

2. Promote physically healthy and safe employees:

Physical health is obviously important to a person’s ability to be a more productive and energetic part of your staff. Show them you care about their health by offering gym memberships at free or reduced prices, or free registrations to classes and courses, or even (where practical) bringing health and exercise experts into your office (or on a video link) for live classes.

3. Promote mentally healthy and safe employees:

Employee burnout is no stranger to the association management profession, or the hospitality industry. When work stress is added to personal, financial, and even emotional stress, people sometimes have trouble coping and remaining productive. Offer your staff some mental health and/or stress management support. They may not be willing to step forward even though they are in need, but if you make it available – and confidential – you may get more takers than you think.

By all means, provide your members and prospective members with the programmes and services your organisation has identified as the value of membership. But do not hesitate to remind them of that biggest value of all – the work and support of their single biggest dues investment, their organisation’s staff.

Why **Associations** Could Consider Having Their Own **Top 100 Influencer Index**

As a previous recipient of an industry top 100 most influential award, I realised the value of what it felt like to be a receiver of a most influential person award. Here is why running a top most influential people index could work for an association:

- It can create great PR for the association not only within the membership but also the wider sector and even stimulate membership growth;
- It can help reward over 100 people as opposed to industry awards that only recognise a handful of people;
- It helps engage all members but especially a younger audience, a challenge many associations have in recruitment;
- It is based on real data on the individual's social media, and therefore, it is driving true influence as opposed to a popularity contest;
- You own the index, giving you a legacy to run it year after year. In fact, recipients from the top **National Hair & Beauty Federation (NHBF)**, the UK's largest trade association for hairdressing, are now keen to not only be in the index but to be ranked higher than the previous year;
- You can create splinter awards by region, different member types, under 30s winners (just a few examples of how you can diversify your awards);
- The campaign and or event are highly sponsorable and, indeed, its aims are to drive net revenue, too;
- It helps stimulate the associations' social media accounts following and very much that of the members' accounts too.

The NHBF Commented on their results:

"49,417 accounts reached in one week (+234% from the previous week), 0.2% from ads and promotions. We reached

+7,155% more accounts that weren't following us compared to the previous week."

An event that follows the announcement of the top 100 can share the actual rankings, and this is highly sponsorable. The one that I was a recipient of in 2018 achieved over 2 million impressions and a net revenue of over £12,000 (approximately 14,100€) for the organisation.

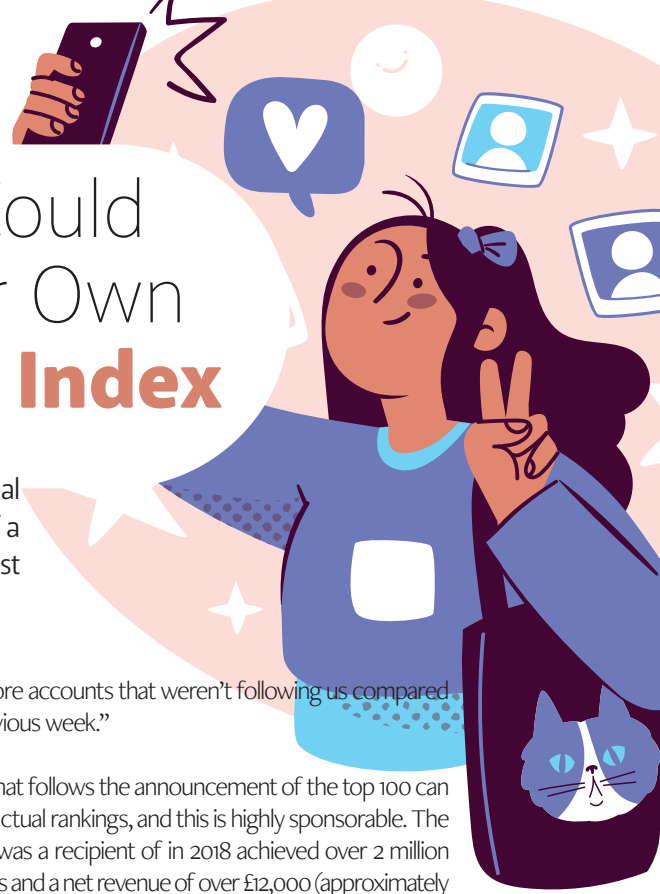
Examples of this are the **National Hair and Beauty Top 100** created by the NHBF, currently in its third year, and the **Foodservice Equipment Association**, which for the last two years has run its event before the annual conference, driving additional sales for their events and bringing a wider range of people together.

As an experienced Influencer marketer and association expert this is a great way to break the mould of some of the traditional awards. If you would like to find out more about running your own one, please contact me. I am happy to share more case studies and examples.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gordon Glenister is an international expert on influencer marketing and membership, having founded **Membership World**, a community of associations and membership bodies. Gordon also hosts *Influence*, the global podcast, and is an award-winning author of influencer marketing strategy.





Technology as a Resource for More Inclusive Events

Event technology can be a powerful tool for promoting DEI across our industry – helping organisers create more inclusive environments and reach wider audiences. Data-driven decision-making is one way in which digital tools can make positive changes, by enabling them to collect and analyse information related to DEI.

Behavioural analysis, surveys and feedback forms can be used to gather insights on attendees' experiences and perceptions.

This data can then be used to identify areas where improvements are needed, ensuring that future events are even more inclusive.

Event tech also allows for better representation through virtual options. Digital features can democratise access to opportunities by allowing a more diverse range of speakers and participants to engage in the event.

Geographical and financial constraints that often limit diversity can also be overcome by providing virtual participation options, enabling global voices to be heard.

Meanwhile, event technology allows for the creation of personalised experiences. For example, event apps can offer content in multiple languages. AI-powered algorithms can also help users find sessions that cater to their specific interests, cutting out the need for excessive searching. This level of customisation ensures that attendees from diverse backgrounds feel their needs and preferences are considered.

Technology can also facilitate networking opportunities that might not occur naturally in physical settings.

Digital networking tools – such as AI-driven matchmaking platforms – can connect individuals with similar interests or backgrounds, fostering a sense of community among attendees.

Diversity refers to the representation of different groups – including but not limited to race, gender, age, sexual orientation, abilities and more. Equity ensures that everyone has the same opportunities, while Inclusion ensures that all individuals feel welcome and valued.

Together, DEI initiatives help break down barriers, foster innovation, and create a more equitable world.

At **ExpoPlatform**, we love the events industry, but we also love life outside of work. That is why we offer opportunities for people to thrive in an environment which suits them best.

It means we can foster a more open, diverse and dynamic workforce. However, the work does not stop there. To effectively leverage technology in promoting DEI, event organisers should start by setting clear DEI goals for their events. This involves understanding the diverse needs of potential attendees and selecting the right technologies to meet those needs. Collaborating with DEI experts can also provide valuable insights and ensure that the technology is implemented effectively.

Additionally, continuous evaluation and feedback are crucial. Organisers should regularly assess the effectiveness of their DEI initiatives and be open to making adjustments as needed. By staying committed to these principles, the events industry can not only promote DEI, but also set a standard for other sectors to follow.

While the journey towards full inclusivity is ongoing, event technology offers a powerful means to create more diverse, equal, and inclusive experiences. Embracing these tools means event organisers can help pave the way for a more equitable industry.

Scan the QR code below to know more about ExpoPlatform.



Let's be clear: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion are not just buzzwords. They are essential elements of a healthy and vibrant society.



Creating **Inclusive Events**: Cvent's Commitment to **Accessibility** and **Diversity**

Cvent, a leading provider of tech solutions for meetings, events, and hospitality management, has recently introduced several initiatives to help planners make their events more accessible and inclusive, including the blueprint *The Big Book of Event Accessibility*, the webinar *No Attendee Left Behind: Making Events Accessible to All*, and the podcast *Widening the Welcome: Stephen Cutchins on Elevating Event Accessibility*. Taking the opportunity at **IMEX 2024**, **HQ's Deputy Editor, Jesús Guerrero Chacón**, interviewed **Felicia Asiedu, Marketing Director for Europe at Cvent and Co-Founder of Diverse Speaker Bureau**, to explore the company's dedication to accessibility, inclusion, and diversity. Here are her thoughts.

Understanding Accessibility and Implementing Strategies

What are some key strategies for making events more accessible?

To make events more accessible, it is important to start with a deep understanding of what accessibility really means. It is not just a buzzword; it requires real knowledge and commitment. Working with accessibility experts is crucial because they provide insights that most of us might miss. For example, someone once showed me an AI-generated image of a wheelchair, but it was the wrong type for the event setting. I would not have noticed that detail. But this kind of detail is vital, and experts can guide you through these nuances. Asking attendees about their specific needs at registration is another key strategy. It allows you to gather data and act on it, whether it is providing sign language interpreters or ensuring step-free access. The key is to ask, listen and then implement solutions based on that feedback.



Felicia Asiedu's insights highlight the critical role of intentionality in making events accessible and inclusive. Cvent's initiatives, such as *The Big Book of Event Accessibility*, provide important resources for event planners striving to accommodate diverse audiences. By asking the right questions, leveraging technology, and promoting diverse teams, the event industry can cultivate an inclusive environment that welcomes all attendees.

How can technology and AI assist in this process?

Technology plays an important role in improving accessibility. At Cvent, we have developed tools that flag potential accessibility issues, such as incompatible colour combinations on event websites. These tools provide alerts and guidance to help planners make informed decisions. AI can be a powerful ally by generating initial ideas or content, but human oversight is critical. AI can reflect the biases of its creators, so it's important to have diverse teams review and refine AI-generated content. AI should be used as a starting point to prompt further human-led questioning and refinement.

The Role of Diverse Teams and Representation

How important is it to have diverse teams and speakers at events?

Having diverse teams is critical to identifying and eliminating bias and ensuring that our events are truly inclusive. Diverse speakers bring a range of perspectives that challenge the *status quo* and enrich discussions. It is not just about visual diversity, but also diversity of thought, skills and experience. This diversity brings fresh ideas and challenges conventional thinking, which is essential for growth and innovation in the events industry.

Inviting speakers from different cultural, professional and experiential backgrounds enriches the dialogue and brings in new ways of thinking. This diversity helps to approach and solve problems from multiple angles, which is particularly important in today's complex and rapidly changing environment. Diverse speakers can share unique insights and experiences that resonate with different segments of the audience, making the event more engaging and relevant to a broader group of people.

Representation also matters. When participants see speakers who look like them or have similar experiences, it creates a sense of belonging and validation. It signals that their voices and perspectives are valued and that they too have a place in the conversation. This can inspire and motivate participants to contribute more

actively, creating a more dynamic and inclusive event atmosphere.

At Cvent, we are committed to not just ticking boxes, but truly integrating diversity into the core of our event planning. Utilising a platform like the **Diverse Speaker Bureau** is one step towards this goal, ensuring that every panel is inclusive, thought-provoking and innovative. By prioritising diversity in our speaker selection, we aim to set a standard for the industry and encourage others to follow suit.

Impact of Inclusive Practices

Can you share some examples of how inclusive practices have positively impacted events?

Inclusive practices can significantly enhance the attendee experience and broaden the reach of events. For example, providing captions as a standard practice can benefit not only those with hearing impairments but also attendees who prefer to follow along with written text. At Cvent, we have seen how small adjustments, like ensuring accessible transportation options and having trained staff on-site, can make a significant difference. These practices fulfil a social responsibility and also drive business benefits by making events more welcoming to a diverse audience, thereby increasing participation and engagement.

What final thoughts do you have on fostering inclusivity and diversity within the industry?

Promoting inclusivity and diversity requires a proactive approach. It is about seeking out and including people who are different from you in every way. This diversity fuels creativity and innovation. Whether it is a small roundtable discussion or a large conference, getting out of your comfort zone is key. Working with organisations such as **Events 101** in the UK, which supports new entrants to the events industry, can provide fresh perspectives. Ultimately, inclusivity and diversity should be woven into the fabric of event planning from conception to execution, ensuring that everyone feels welcome and valued.

cvent



DEI for **Enhanced Global Collaboration** and a **Greater Event Experience**

AUTHOR: ESTEFANÍA ZÁRATE ANGARITA, KENES GROUP MEDIA & COMMUNICATION MANAGER



As a leading world-class Professional Conference Organiser – PCO, with six decades of expertise in scientific, medical and professional associations, **Kenes Group** fully understands its role in enabling global knowledge exchange. In the context of scientific advancement towards the improvement of patient outcomes, the relevance of DEI goes beyond representation, as it elevates the conversation within a field by providing a wider spectrum of research and testimonies from diverse sources, regions of the world, and socio-economic circumstances.

With this in mind, Kenes Group’s Sustainability Policy includes a section dedicated to DEI, aimed at improving both employees’ and partners’ practices that create long-lasting impact. Read them below:

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Kenes Sustainability Policy

It is one of Kenes core values to support DEI policies across all our activities, whether internal or external, concerning all people regardless of their ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, age, or other identities. We believe and embrace DEI in creating a workplace and organising events where everyone feels welcome, respected and valued.

Our strategy and initiatives show what DEI means to us, why it matters to us and how we approach it.

We commit to continuous learning and improvement to create a more inclusive environment in all our offices, business strategies and operations, clients, associations, and events managed.



Internal objectives:

- Include DEI in the internal office policies and procedures and ensure that they are fair and equitable;
- Develop and train all employees on the organisation's harassment prevention, policies and procedures;
- Follow and implement equal employment opportunities in all Kenes offices and subsidiaries;
- Highlight the diversity and inclusion goals for hiring and leadership, promoting diversity of thought, backgrounds, experiences and skills;
- Have a code of conduct in place to address bias and discrimination;
- Maintain an environment that is free from discrimination, and where employees and candidates are treated fairly, with respect, and valued, where everyone has the same opportunities to succeed;
- Promote open communication and provide opportunities for employees to connect;
- Create mentorship programmes connecting newly hired and more experienced employees to provide guidance and support.

External objectives:

- Include DEI as part of event strategies and guidelines;
- Maintain an environment that is free from discrimination, and where customers and attendees are treated fairly and with respect;
- Make sure that our event planning teams are diverse and that everyone feels comfortable sharing their ideas and perspectives. Proceed to create a space and atmosphere where everyone's voices are heard;
- Do the utmost to increase and invite more diverse speakers, performers and attendees and create a more inclusive environment;
- Set specific DEI goals for our attendees and speakers at each event. Track our progress over time so that we can identify areas where we need to improve;
- Make sure that marketing materials reflect the diversity of attendees and use inclusive language throughout;
- Make our events accessible, and this includes a fully accessible venue and exhibition with ramps, providing accommodations for people with disabilities, as well as offering childcare and different food options;
- Partner with organisations and companies that are committed to DEI to promote our events and to attract attendees

While Kenes Group's commitment to DEI is well-known by the global team, the continuous challenge is to actively engage the numerous event partners and association leaders in the pursuit of these objectives, which ultimately represent enhanced collaboration and an overall greater experience for all.

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