

Meetings Outlook

Q2 2026: As more-with-less demands continue for many event professionals, honing strategy and eliminating noise help paint a picture for near-future success.



When financial challenges meet the expectation economy

Costs are up, attendance optimism is down and “favorable” budgets still don’t quite feel like relief. This landscape is forcing event professionals to focus on value and the experience while defending what makes in-person indispensable.

BY **MICHAEL PINCHERA**

RESULTS OF MPI’S Q2 2026 MEETINGS Outlook survey indicate an industry learning to operate in a world where the cost of producing events keeps climbing while the bar for proving value keeps rising. The result is a squeeze—

part inflation, part expectation economy—and it’s showing up not only in budgets and bookings, but in the tone of planners who feel they’re being asked to deliver premium outcomes with increasing constraints.

MOST MAJOR METRICS DIP

Overall business projections cooled this quarter as 47% of respondents describe conditions as favorable (down from 57% in Q1) and 34% share negative expectations (up from 25%). This is in line with what many experienced in late 2025—cautious, cost-aware and less willing to bet on straightforward growth.

Attendance expectations followed suit, and that may be the sharper signal. Positive live attendance forecasts fell from 60% to 47%, while negative expectations rose to 33% and an additional 20% report this to be flat. Thus, the majority of respondents expect attendance to decline or remain flat, and that can impact everything from room block strategy and F&B minimums to sponsor packages and staffing models.

Budget projections are slightly better with 55% of respondents citing favorable expectations this

quarter. But that improvement doesn't necessarily equate to relief. "Favorable" budgets can still be underwater once accounting for price increases—and especially when late registrations make forecasting less reliable and contracts less forgiving. Event professionals are seeing more right-sizing, more scrutiny of every line item and more pressure to defend anything that could be perceived as a "nice-to-have."

"Consistent increase in prices for everything has made budgeting a constant problem," Corrine Thompson-Melissari, CMP (MPI Potomac Chapter), director of events, National Alliance on Mental Illness, shared in survey comments. "I do what I can to forecast future years with enough wiggle room for the anticipated increases, but it means I've had to get creative in how I use things. I have tried to minimize the number of vendors needed by working with those that can offer multiple

services as a way to save money."

Respondent comments this quarter tend to cluster around several key forces: money, modernization and uncertainty, emblematic of the financial and growth pressures event professionals are facing, in addition to economic and geopolitical volatility.

On the attendee side, the experience conversation is evolving from "make it engaging" to "make it worth it." When time and travel budgets are constrained, the event must deliver something that virtual events can't: meaningful connection and the kind of professional energy that sustains

"Consistent increase in prices for everything has made budgeting a constant problem."

CORRINE THOMPSON-MELISSARI, CMP

Director of Events, National Alliance on Mental Illness
MPI Potomac Chapter

communities and professionals. That helps explain moves toward shorter, smaller and more flexible event formats. It also shows up in changing expectations—especially among younger participants—for wellness options, more intentional social experiences and personalization and inclusivity as table stakes.

"The biggest shift right now is toward outcomes over logistics," Michael Farrell, CTA (MPI Carolinas Chapter), director of development at Van Wagner, reported in his survey comments. "It's not enough to just produce a well-run event, there's more pressure to show what actual-

ly changed because of it. At the same time, people expect more meaningful connection and less passive content. In response, we're being more intentional upfront. We define what behaviors we want to drive, design around that and measure against it.”

THE HUMAN IMPACT

One of the more promising shifts is the industry's widening definition of success. Measuring the human impact of events is now mainstream as 76% of respondents say it's extremely or very important and most (58%) report having a formal framework.

Most such measurement programs rely on post-event surveys, while fewer tap community feedback, social sentiment or behavioral/engagement data. The greatest constraints are difficulty quantifying intangibles, struggling with low response rates, unclear definitions and insufficient time to build a strategy. Notably, 52% measure

“Events are no longer just about gathering people; they are about creating meaningful, measurable human and business impact.”

PAOLA CONTRERAS

Director, Pink & Punk | MPI Mexico Chapter

this impact immediately after the event, pointing to a near-term opportunity: add lightweight follow-ups that capture the outcomes stakeholders care most about.

“Events are no longer just about gathering people; they are about creating meaningful, measurable human and business impact,” Paola Contreras (MPI Mexico Chapter), director, Pink & Punk, said in her survey comments.

NEAR-FUTURE FOCUS

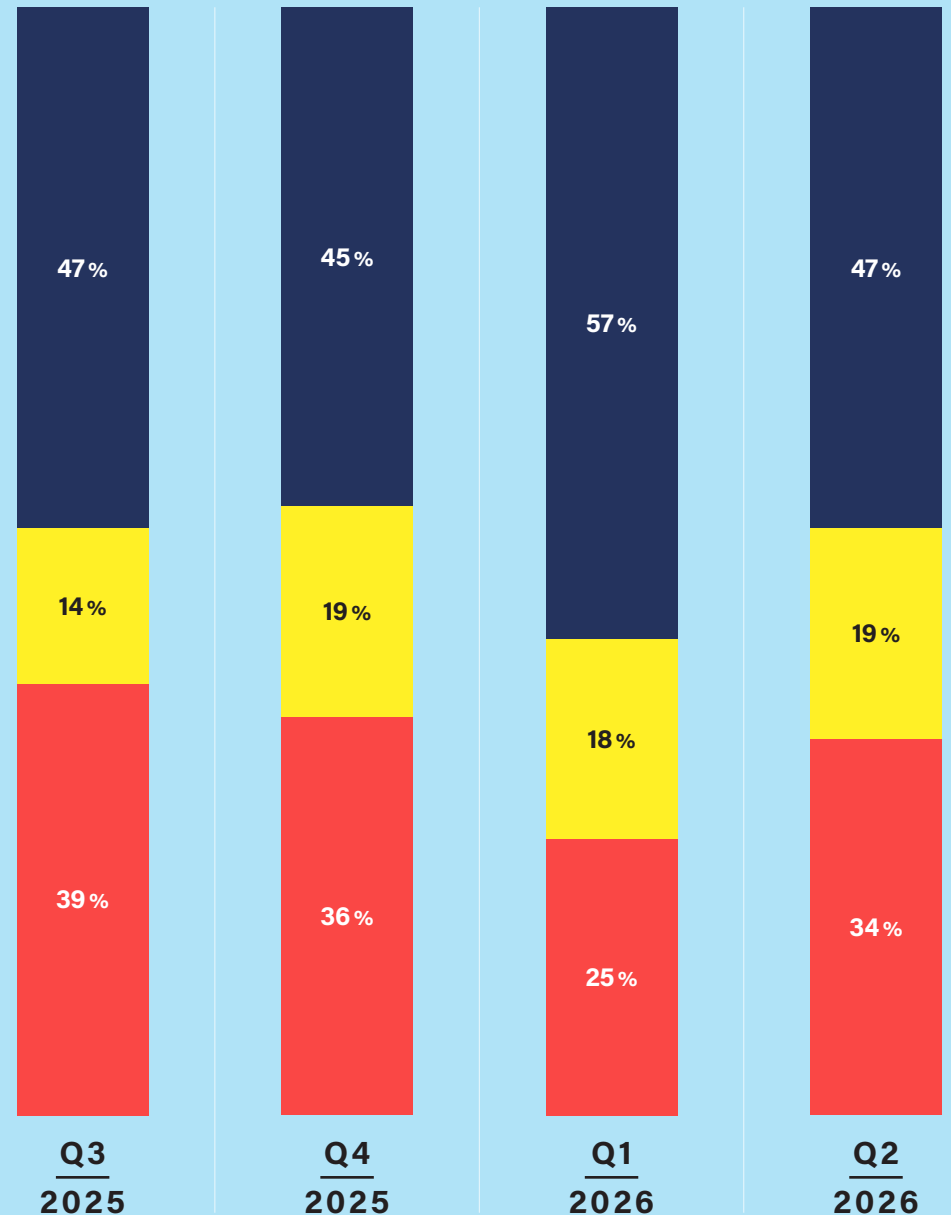
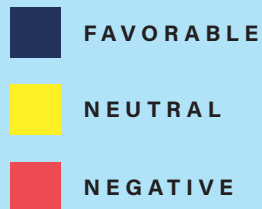
In this landscape, event professionals will be well-served by protecting the experience components that

drive attendance and stakeholder value, renegotiating flexibility where possible and upgrading measurement capabilities to defend spend with both ROI and credible human-impact evidence. Over the next 6-12 months, don't simply cut costs—eliminate the noise while preserving the moments that make in-person indispensable.

The Q2 2026 Meetings Outlook survey received a total of 163 unique responses between March 18 and April 1, 2026.

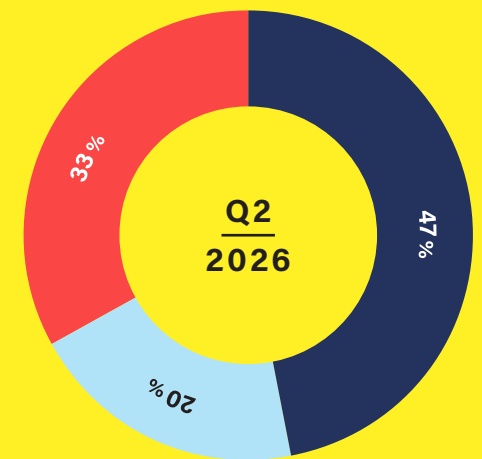
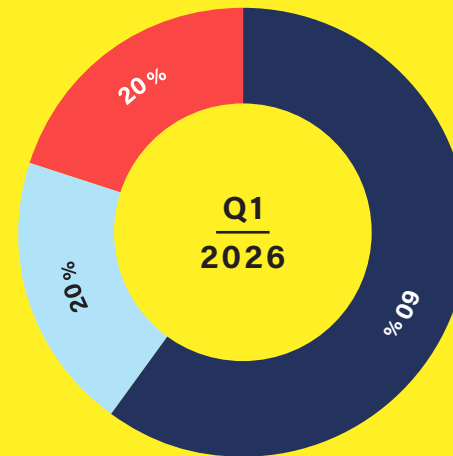
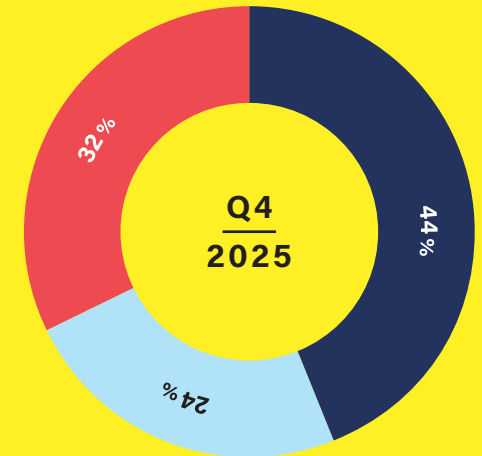
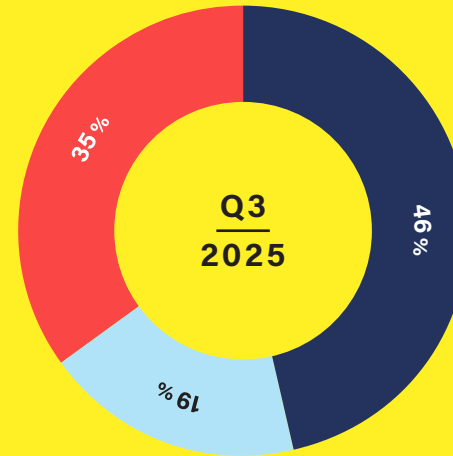
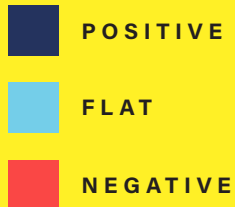
BUSINESS CONDITIONS

After seeing a positive bump last quarter, overall business projections for the year ahead have slipped back to late 2025 numbers.



ATTENDANCE FORECAST

Right now, less than half of all respondents anticipate positive live attendance while a full one-third expect negative in-person attendance in the year ahead.



BUDGET PROJECTIONS

Even though overall business projections dipped this quarter, budget projections are the most favorable we've seen in more than a year.



Q3 | 2025



Q4 | 2025



Q1 | 2026



Q2 | 2026

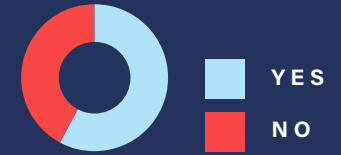
THE HUMAN IMPACT OF EVENTS

Measuring events' impact on people is very important according to most industry pros, but that's not without challenges.

Which of the following methods do you use to measure human impact?

Post-attendee surveys	80 %
Community feedback	32 %
Social media sentiment analysis	28 %
Behavioral or engagement data	25 %
Interviews or focus groups	17 %
Net Promoter Score (NPS)	17 %
We do not currently measure human impact	12 %
Long-term follow-up surveys	9 %

Does your organization have a formal framework or methodology for evaluating the human impact of events?



How important is measuring the human impact of events for your organization?

Extremely important	37 %
Very important	39 %
Moderately important	20 %
Slightly important	4 %
Not at all important	1 %

What are the biggest challenges you face when trying to measure the human impact of events?

Difficulty quantifying intangible outcomes	56 %
Low attendee response rates to surveys or feedback requests	47 %
Lack of clear definition of "human impact"	42 %
Lack of time to design/implement measurement strategies	42 %
Limited tools or technology to track impact effectively	33 %
Insufficient budget or resources	32 %
Limited staff expertise in data analysis or impact measurement	28 %
Lack of internal stakeholder alignment on what to measure	19 %
Privacy concerns of data-collection limitations	19 %
Data is too fragmented across platforms/systems	16 %
Other	3 %



Meetings Outlook is supported in partnership with IMEX Group.
© 2026 Meeting Professionals International