



# MEETINGS OUTLOOK™



*Business projections remain historically weak in the third consecutive Meetings Outlook survey, budgets are expected to continue rising as costs do the same and the demand for meetings and events persists despite new challenges.*

2025 Q4 EDITION



# *A Subdued Events Forecast Reveals* Upside Potential



By Elaine Pofeldt

**C**hristy Lamagna, CMP, is finding that her corporate clients are going in two directions to keep rising budgets from escalating further.

Some of her clients at Strategic Meetings and Events are trying to lock in two-year contracts.

"They want the exact same thing they had last year, even though prices have gone up, and they don't want to spend any more money," says New York City-area-based Lamagna. "So, they are grudgingly paying for things they simply can't get around, but anywhere they can negotiate to either pay last year's prices or minimize an increase, they do. The suggestion is, 'If we are willing to sign your deal, will you freeze our prices so that next year, we can order the same scrambled eggs but pay the 2025 price, not the 2026 price?'"

Other clients are minimizing budget increases by staying flexible.

"You know, they always say, 'Gates, rates and space—you can pick two, but you can't have all three,'" Lamagna says. "So, they're either willing to shift their dates slightly so that they can get a better price or they're willing to change the space slightly. As long as we're not going from an October conference to a January conference, they're willing to be a bit more flexible."

## **A changed business landscape**

MPI's Q4 2025 Meetings Outlook survey found that business condition projections remain historically subdued for the third consecutive quarter. While 45% of respondents indicated a "favorable" outlook, this was a continuation of the anemic results of the past three quarters. However, in

***“There is a slight tightening of sponsored dollars. There are only so many events that Dell, SAP or Oracle can cover. There are only so many that the tech titans can be at so there is going to be a tightening more and more as to who’s going to sponsor your event.”***

**RAMON RAY**

*Speaker, emcee and organizer*

that same period there’s been a positive trend of note: the percentage of respondents anticipating “negative” business conditions has decreased each quarter (36% this quarter, down from Q3’s 43% and Q2’s 57%).

Against this backdrop, budget expectations are rising, reflecting a break from the trend in which this metric tends to move in sync with overall business condition projections. More than half (54%) of respondents predicted “favorable” budgets over the next year (up from 47% in Q3 and 36% in Q2).

Cost increases spurred by inflation and supply chain issues surely play a significant role in the higher budgets. As in the last quarter, most event professionals (72%) report negative impacts from the U.S. government’s executive orders and policy changes this year, with 51% citing *only* negative impacts. The most common negative impacts reported: cost increases (mentioned by 64%) and reduced international attendance (52%).

“Increasing costs means increasing our budget,” said Nichole Ferree (MPI New England Chapter), senior marketing manager, events at Clarivate in Boston, in her survey response. “Increased demand for hosted events in our industry means adding budget and resources.”

At the same time, nearly one-third of respondents (31%) still expect negative budget/spend on the horizon. A significant number of respondents (42%) noted a partial loss of event funding as a result of recent U.S. government actions, while 22% experienced a complete loss thereof. Additionally, one-quarter of respondents cited having to postpone events.

Kristin Torres (MPI Rocky Mountain Chapter), executive director, meetings and events at the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association in Englewood, Colo., shared, “We are expected to do more with less money,” in her survey response. “I have found that cities and venues are all bottom-line driven. It’s very difficult to create the same

## BUDGET PROJECTIONS

While this point often mirrors the projected business condition data, we now instead see a clear trend for increasing budget projections over the past three quarters. Nearly one-third of respondents (31%), however, still expect negative budget/spend on the horizon.



	Q1 '25	Q2 '25	Q3 '25	Q4 '25
<b>Favorable</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>54%</b>
<b>Flat</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Negative</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>31%</b>



***“I have found that cities and venues are all bottom-line driven. It’s very difficult to create the same experience or try to do something new or different on the same budget.”***

**KRISTIN TORRES**

MPI Rocky Mountain Chapter

experience or try to do something new or different on the same budget.”

Some meeting professionals are being forced to raise prices in response to supply chain challenges, cited as a problem by 23% of respondents. Lilian Chan (MPI Southern California Chapter), lead event planner and producer at JM Events Co., an event planning and production team in Los Angeles, is feeling the squeeze.

“I have to increase my prices to account for the supply chain issues and increasing cost of goods,” she said in her survey response.

**The currency of engagement**

Adding to Chan's overhead is the rising price of keeping attendees engaged.

“It’s become increasingly expensive to wow event participants!” she wrote.

The increasing cost of capturing attendees’ attention was a frequent refrain in the survey results.

“There is a lot of ‘I’ve seen this already,’” said Arlene George, CMP, HMCC (MPI Philadelphia Area Chapter), a planner from Philadelphia. “Trying to get a new spin on something and stay within budget is getting very difficult, especially in union cities.”

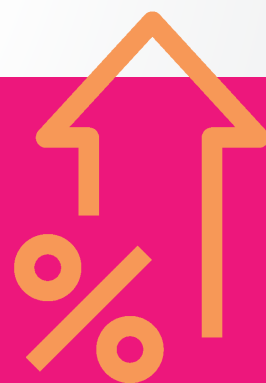
Mary Anne Whittle, CMP, director of events at Prosper Forum in Gilbert, Ariz., and immediate past president of the MPI Arizona Sunbelt Chapter, finds the onus is on planners and organizers to rekindle the spark with attendees.

“People seem to have ‘seen it all,’” Whittle said in her survey response. “We have to continue to raise the bar and keep things fresh, which plays hard on the budget.”

To keep interest in meetings high, it’s essential to build community year-round, says Nancy Shenker, an event marketer based in Phoenix and former CMO of Reed Exhibitions. That is especially true for second-tier meetings, she finds.

## BUSINESS CONDITIONS

While the percentage of respondents indicating a “favorable” outlook for the year ahead remains historically low (45%), there’s a positive trend in that the percentage of respondents anticipating “negative” business conditions has decreased for each of the past three quarters.



	Q1 '25	Q2 '25	Q3 '25	Q4 '25
<b>Favorable</b>	71%	31%	47%	45%
<b>Neutral</b>	18%	12%	14%	19%
<b>Negative</b>	10%	57%	43%	36%

“It’s getting harder and harder to get people to actually show up, unless you have a big-brand conference that is a must-attend for your industry,” she says. “You need either an A-list speaker or an A-list experience.

Sometimes the venue itself can be a deciding factor.”

In this environment, sponsorships are, in some cases, harder to come by, with 27% of respondents citing this. Ramon Ray, a New York City-area-based emcee

## GOVERNMENTAL IMPACTS

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

	Q2 '25	Q3 '25	Q4 '25
Yes, both positive and negative impacts	13%	22%	21%
Yes, only positive impacts	1%	1%	0%
Yes, only negative impact	62%	48%	51%
No	9%	11%	14%
Unsure	15%	18%	14%

While cost increases remain the most widespread way in which those experiencing negative impacts are being affected (noted by 64% of respondents)—followed by “reduced international attendance” (noted by 52% of respondents)—other factors saw greater movement, quarter over quarter.

What’s gotten worse: In the past quarter, there’s been a 31% increase in the percentage of respondents reporting partial loss of event funding, and a 24% increase in respondents citing reduced domestic attendance.

What’s improved: In that same time, there’s been a 34% decrease in the percentage of respondents experiencing postponed events, and a 30% decrease in respondents citing supply chain difficulties.

**The Top 10 ways in which those experiencing negative impacts report being affected in Q4.**

Cost increases	64%
Reduced international attendance	52%
Partial loss of funding	42%
Cancelled events	41%
Slow down in future bookings	36%
Reduced domestic attendance	36%
Fewer sponsors	27%
More strict contract terms	27%
Postponed events	25%
Supply chain difficulties	23%



***“There is a lot of ‘I’ve seen this already.’ Trying to get a new spin on something and stay within budget is getting very difficult, especially in union cities.”***

**ARLENE GEORGE, CMP, HMCC**  
MPI Philadelphia Area Chapter

and speaker at many tech events and an organizer of small business conferences, finds that sponsors are being increasingly discerning about which events they invest in.

“There is a slight tightening of sponsored dollars,” he says. “There are only so many events that Dell, SAP or

Oracle can cover. There are only so many that the tech titans can be at so there is going to be a tightening more and more as to who’s going to sponsor your event.”

With content producers spinning out material using AI, he notes, organizers must put in more effort to win the attention of potential attendees.

## ATTENDANCE FORECASTS

Tracking similarly to business projections, live attendance expectations are also historically low with 44% anticipating this metric will be “favorable” over the next year. The share of respondents anticipating a decrease in live attendance (32%) has, however, itself decreased for the third consecutive quarter as more expect flat numbers.

### Projected Live Attendance

	Q1 '25	Q2 '25	Q3 '25	Q4 '25
Positive	76%	36%	47%	44%
Flat	12%	16%	19%	24%
Negative	12%	48%	35%	32%

### Projected Virtual Attendance

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



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**NANCY SHENKER**

Phoenix-based event marketer

“It’s hard to market,” Ray says. “The fight for attention is huge.”

### **The virtual upside**

One unexpected bright spot, says Lamagna, is online events. When attendees are reluctant to travel, they are joining many events virtually instead.

“Our attendance is larger, but our in-person attendance has gone down slightly, and our overall attendance has gone up dramatically,” she says, explaining how an event that formerly attracted 350 in-person attendees might now draw 500 overall, with 300 in-person and the rest virtual.

This evolution toward hybrid meetings has led to events that move more smoothly, she discovered.

“The side effect, which has been wonderful from a strategist perspective, is that if you have a virtual audience, clients become much more mindful of time,” Lamagna says.

They are more likely to avoid running overtime if they know 200 people will be left waiting on a livestream than they would be at an in-person event, if, for instance, a Q&A session ran over and led to lunch being served 10 minutes late.

“It has really whipped my presenters into shape,” she says. “It has caused meetings to become much more efficient from a timing perspective.”

### **A staffing slowdown**

In another key trend, the latest Meetings Outlook report

found full-time employment to be stagnant, with only 18% of respondents seeing growth in hiring (the same as last quarter), and 22% reporting a decrease in such hiring. The latter is up from 16% the previous quarter and is the greatest percentage to report a decrease in full-time hiring since 2021. Meanwhile, a majority of respondents noted full-time hiring levels as unchanged.

Ray has noticed that many organizers are hiring consultants.

“Everybody is using contractors because it’s an industry where, for good or for bad, you hit a button and you can get 20 people at your event at relatively low cost to staff the table,” he says. “What I’m seeing at most events is you have the core event staff and everything else is contractor-based—the whole AV team, the video team, the event manager.”

Where there is “insourcing,” Lamagna sees employers leaning toward junior staffers. However, she finds that many clients volley between insourcing and outsourcing in a quest for greater budget efficiency.

“The universe is constantly expanding and contracting,” she says.

Current challenges haven’t stopped young people from entering the field. Whittle pointed to “how many young professionals are entering the marketplace as professional meeting planners, and how many preferred on-the-job experience versus a four-year degree prior to entering the industry” in her survey response. While there may be challenges ahead, that doesn’t seem to be stopping newcomers from giving the industry a try.



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