Meetings Outlook

Q4 2026: *Event professional confidence continues to rebound, but staffing, spending and other important metrics point to a near future of measured expansion rather than runaway growth.*

MPI

A cautious recovery

Meetings Outlook sees a strong industry led by in-person activity but shaped by selective commitments, closer scrutiny of value and the need to remain flexible amid economic and geopolitical uncertainty.

BY **MICHAEL PINCHERA**

THIS QUARTER'S DATA POINTS TO an industry moving forward with renewed confidence, although not with complete certainty. Business expectations strengthened, live attendance projections returned to their early-year level and most respondents anticipate higher spending.

Yet survey respondents' comments reveal a widening gap between expectations and resources: rising F&B, audiovisual, lodging and operating costs are colliding with budgets that are flat or failing to keep pace. Staffing is holding steady, virtual attendance expectations show little growth momentum and perceptions of buyer and seller leverage are evenly divided.

CONFIDENCE GROWS, WITH LIMITS

Projected business conditions are the most favorable seen in the survey since early 2025, with 62% eyeing a better landscape. Still, the results do not point to expectations of rapid expansion.

In Q4, 32% of respondents anticipate business conditions improving by only 1% to 5%, compared with 19% expecting improvement of 6% to 10%. Only 11% are expecting gains greater than 10%. The industry appears more confident about the direction of business, but many event professionals remain practical about the likely pace—a perspective echoed in comments about uncertain funding, economic volatility and the need to make more deliberate choices about where limited resources will have the greatest impact.

Live attendance expectations reinforce that measured optimism with favorable projections expressed by 60% of respondents, supporting continued confidence in the value of in-person events.

There are, however, signs of somewhat stronger ambitions as 28% of respondents expect live attendance to increase by more than 5% over the next 12 months, up from 21% at the start of the year. This supports ongoing preparation for continued demand while carefully testing assumptions. Respondents' comments add further variables to that planning: political volatility, changing travel requirements and uncertain funding may complicate destination selection, international participation and contingency plans even when overall attendance expectations remain favorable.

Virtual attendance follows a distinctly different path as favorable expectations remained within a narrow 24% to 26% range throughout all of 2026. Nearly half of Q4 respondents (49%) expect no change. With in-person growth expectations exceeding virtual growth expectations by 35 percentage points, the contrast is clear.

Budget projections are positive and stable—hovering between 54% and 56% all year—yet 24% of respondents foresee a negative budget future, underscoring that financial pressure continues. That pressure dominated substantive respondent comments, appearing more than twice as often as any other topic.

As with business conditions, the most common budget increase projection is modest. Nearly one-third of respondents (31%) expect spending to rise by 1% to 5%. Spending expectations therefore trail both business improvement and live attendance growth. This does not prove that budgets will be insufficient, but it reinforces the need to prioritize investments and demonstrate value.

Respondents described concentrating resources on the elements that create meaningful interaction, personalization and smoother attendee journeys while seeking efficiencies elsewhere. Some also linked financial constraints to lower attendance or fewer events, sharpen-

> "One of the most significant trends I'm seeing is the **growing gap between expectations and budgets.**"
>
> **ANGELA YEUNG, CMP, DES, CGTP**
> MPI Toronto Chapter



ing the challenge of meeting expectations without simply adding cost.

The same measured outlook extends to event safety and security. Overall concern has eased as the pandemic era recedes, but the threat landscape is changing rather than disappearing. Economic and political stability rank as respondents' leading concerns, international conflict has risen sharply and risks such as data breaches, mass-casualty events and power-grid instability register more strongly as future concerns than their recent impact might suggest.

Event professionals appear to be responding with vigilance rather than alarm. Most respondents express confidence in their existing safety and security contingency plans, while more than half have increased the associated planning or resources.

MEASURED PROGRESS

For event professionals, the practical response is cautious confidence. Prepare for opportunity, but test demand assumptions and remain flexible as economic conditions, politics and travel requirements change. Protect the spending and experience elements that produce clear value—especially meaningful interaction, personalization and smoother attendee journeys—without treating favorable sentiment as proof of abundant resources or unrestricted growth.

As most of these results measure expectations rather than realized outcomes, the strongest conclusion is about direction: the industry enters the next year with firmer confidence and continued belief in live events, while facing a heightened need to justify both their financial cost and attendees' time.

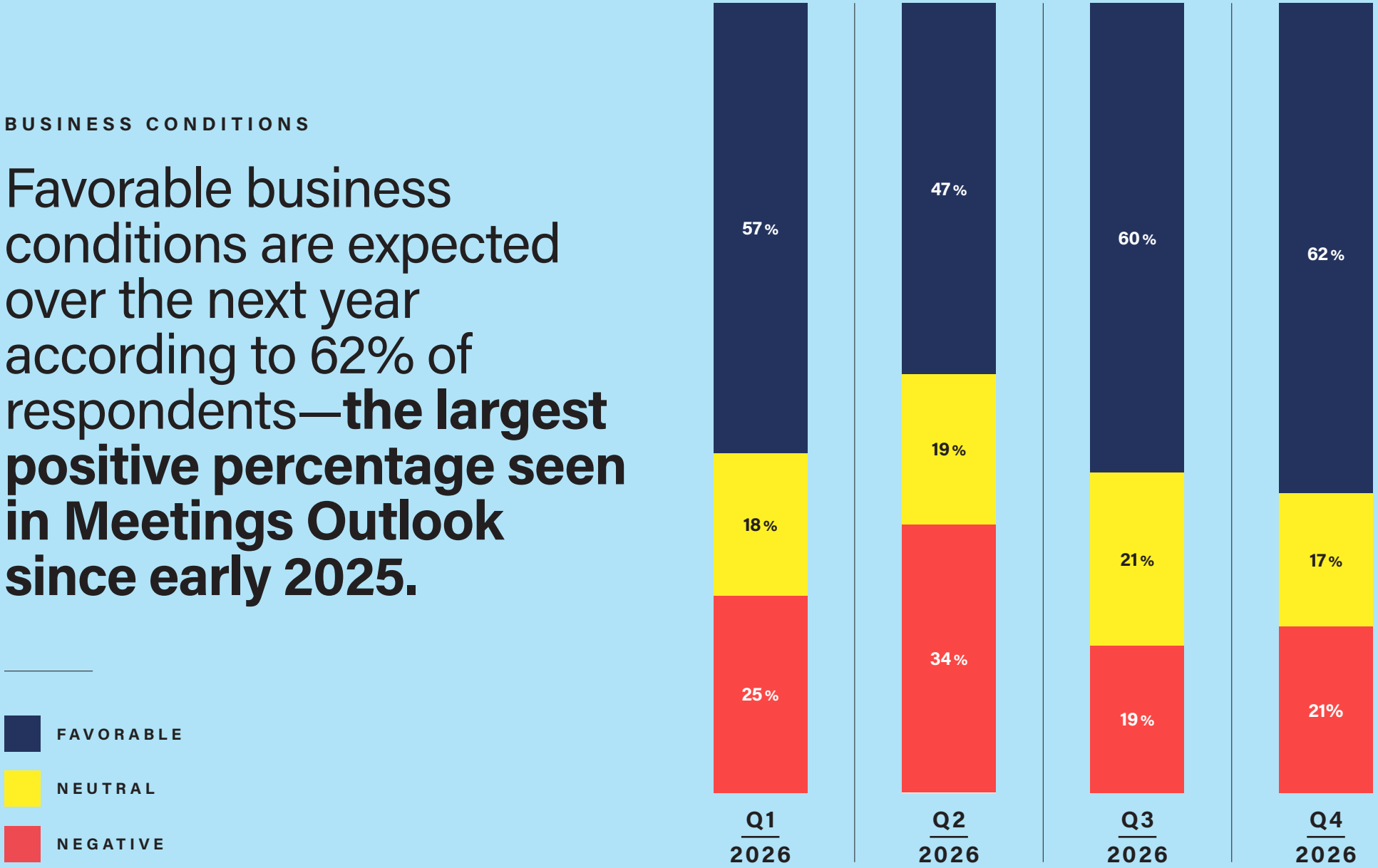
> "The biggest shift I'm seeing is that **people are hungry for real connection, not just content.**"
>
> **LACHANDRA BAKER, MBA, ECI, CDP**
> MPI Ohio Chapter

The Q4 2026 Meetings Outlook survey received a total of 345 planner and supplier responses between Sept. 24 and Oct. 9.

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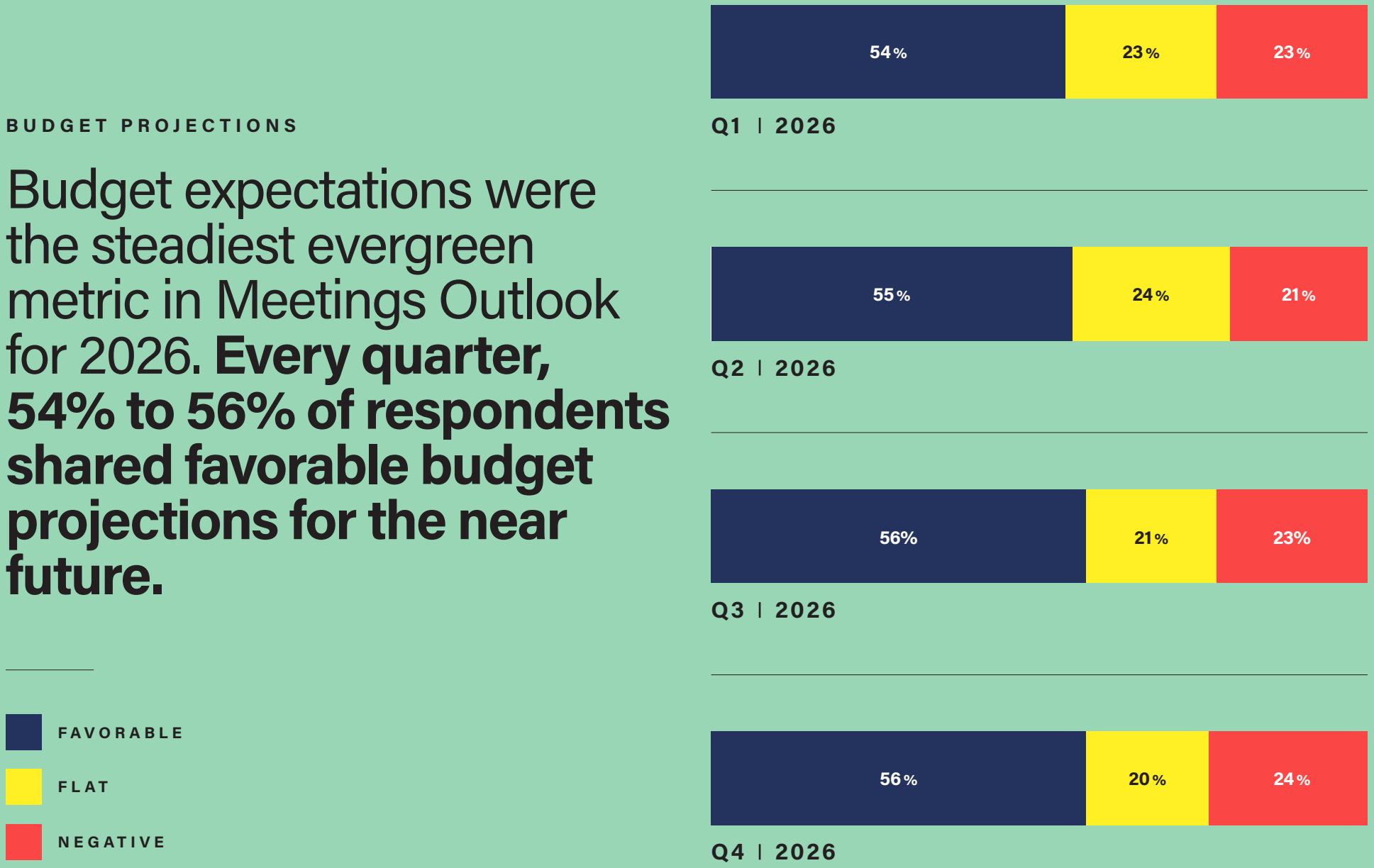
BUSINESS CONDITIONS

Favorable business conditions are expected over the next year according to 62% of respondents—**the largest positive percentage seen in Meetings Outlook since early 2025.**



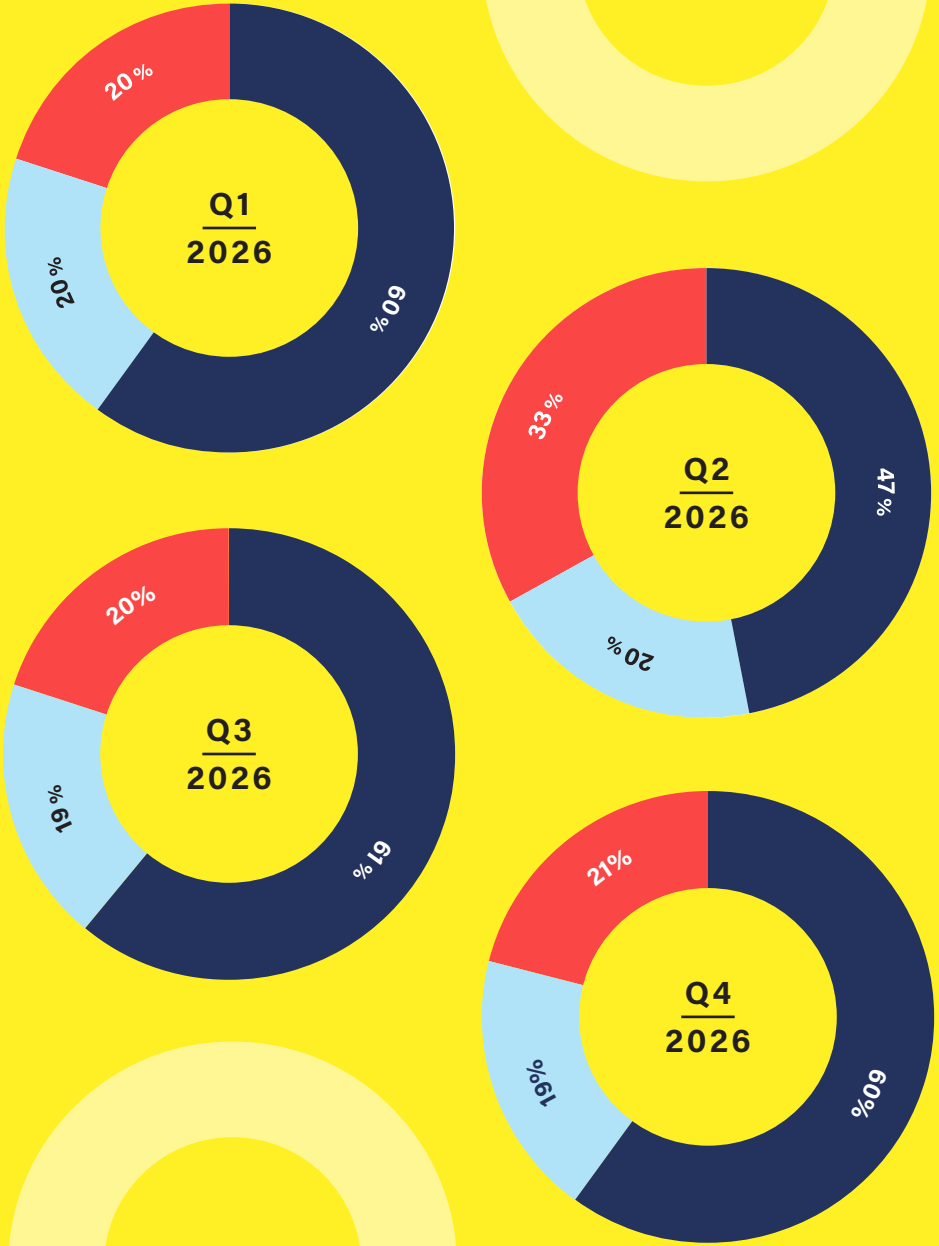
BUDGET PROJECTIONS

Budget expectations were the steadiest evergreen metric in Meetings Outlook for 2026. **Every quarter, 54% to 56% of respondents shared favorable budget projections for the near future.**



IN-PERSON ATTENDANCE

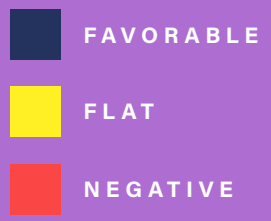
Sixty percent of respondents expect favorable live attendance over the next 12 months. This supports continued confidence in the value of in-person events.

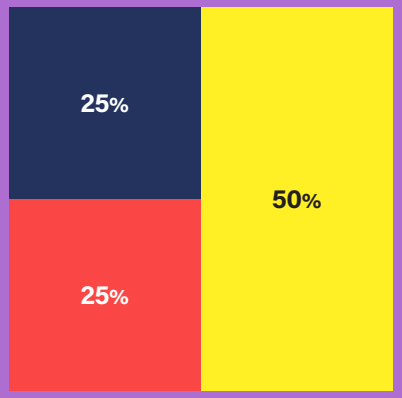


VIRTUAL ATTENDANCE

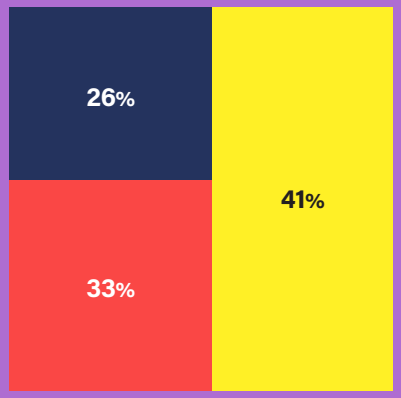
Favorable expectations for virtual attendance remained within a narrow 24% to 26% range throughout all of 2026. Nearly half of respondents expect no change.

These results support the continued evolution of virtual attendance as a more selective, purpose-driven option.

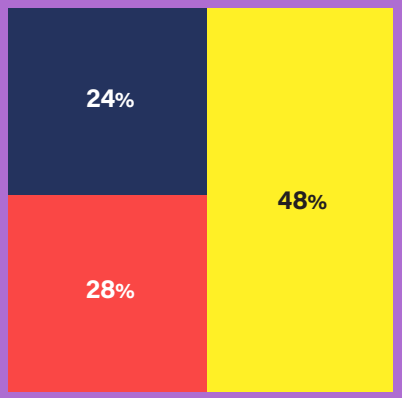




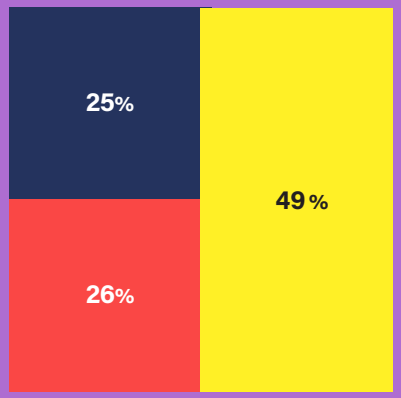
Q1 2026



Q2 2026



Q3 2026



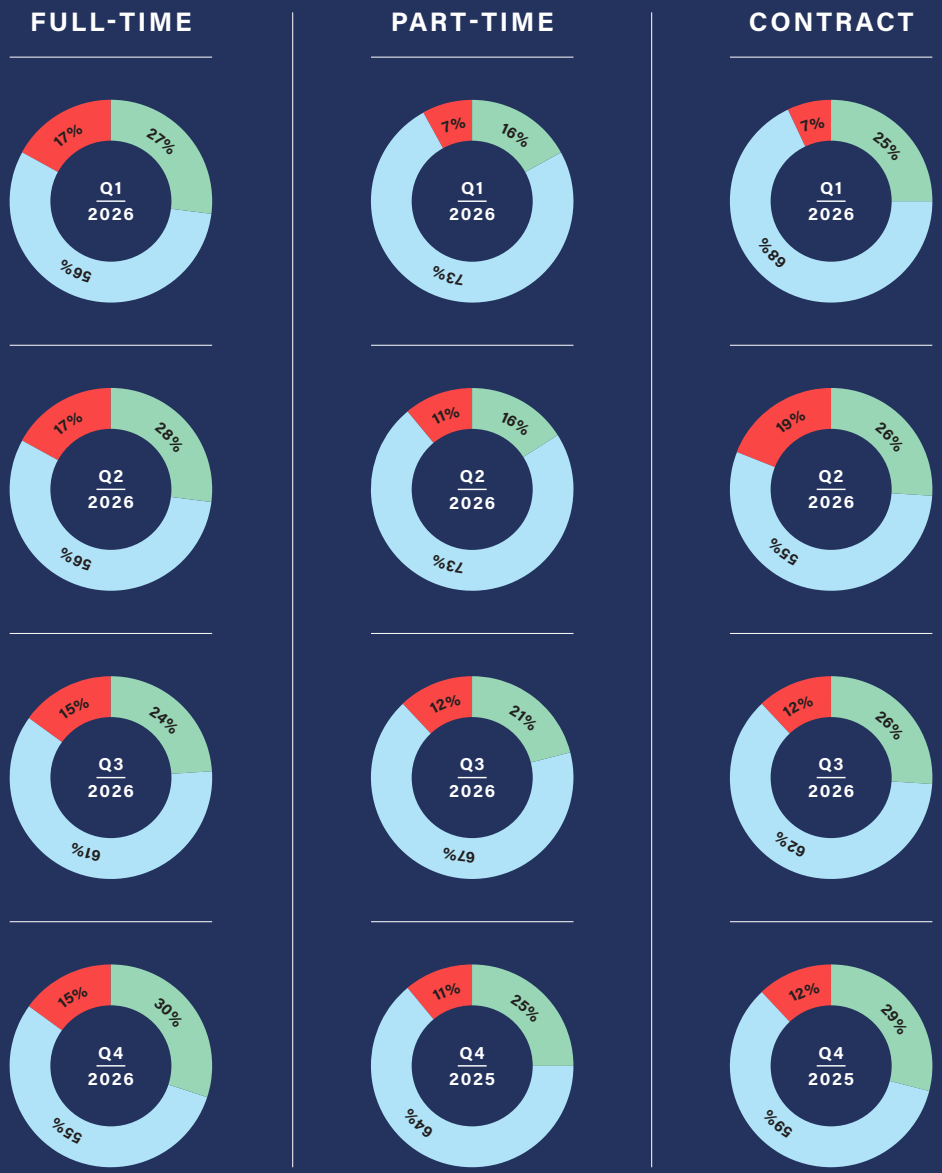
Q4 2026

EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

Event organizations are adding capacity cautiously.

Unchanged staffing remains the most common response for full-time employees, part-time employees and contractors. Even so, the share of respondents reporting increases exceeds the decreases in each category. The share of respondents reporting increases in part-time employment saw the largest gain this year, suggesting selective capacity-building rather than aggressive expansion.





SAFETY AND SECURITY

Although event professionals report lower overall concern than in 2025, the results reveal a changing threat landscape.

Economic stability and political stability were added as response options in the latest survey and immediately ranked first and second, respectively. Among concerns measured in both surveys, international conflict showed the largest increase, rising 15 percentage points to 40%.

How has your organization's approach to event safety/security changed over the past 12 months?

Increased planning/resources	52%
No significant change	37%
Reduced planning/resources	3%
Not sure	8%

How concerned are you with event safety and security right now versus 2025?



LESS CONCERNED | NEITHER MORE NOR LESS CONCERNED | MORE CONCERNED

Top 10 event safety and security concerns heading into the next year

	2027		2025	
1	Economic stability	53%	Natural disasters/severe weather	48%
2	Political stability	50%	Tech/IT outage	34%
3	International conflict/wars	40%	Data breach/hack	33%
4	Natural disasters/severe weather	40%	Social unrest	31%
5	Social unrest	24%	International conflicts	25%
6	Data breach/hack	24%	Infectious disease	24%
7	Tech/IT outages	24%	Protests	22%
8	Transportation infrastructure	20%	Attendee behavior	21%
9	Protests	18%	Transportation infrastructure	20%
10	Attendee behavior	18%	Insurance premiums/availability	17%

How confident are you that your current event safety/security plans would hold up during a major disruption?

Very confident	21%
Somewhat confident	42%
Neither confident nor unconfident	16%
Somewhat unconfident	14%
Very unconfident	3%
Not sure	4%