



The association of the future

Proudly presented by the **ICCA Future Leaders Council**

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The ICCA Future Leaders Council finished their second project elaborating on trends and changes with regards to associations, their membership models and structures as well as engagement opportunities in order to ensure strong, valuable associations in the future.

What is it about – a short preview

The project began by conducting roundtable discussions with ICCA suppliers and associations, to understand from the existing members what they see as the purpose, value and future of associations. We understood that there is more to it than growing your membership base – the value of joining an association lies in the community.

As the community changes, evolves and grows – so must the association. Associations are founded on the concept that one must pay to see behind the wall. This is essentially how associations earn money to survive. But *“I’ll pay for value, but I’m not going to pay to participate.”* was a sentiment brought forward in the roundtables, alluding to a generational shift which may challenge associations in the future.

Rather than the long, one-size-fits-all-list of member benefits, associations need to revamp their member acquisition process to give a clear answer to the question *“Why should I join an association?”* A clearly defined mission and vision are key.

When discussing associations on an international, global level - cultural aspects always play an important role. We divided the roundtables into regions, and summarised key findings from each. We also presented our findings to the ICCA Board of Directors, as a way to directly share our learnings and for leadership to directly involve the next generation of young industry professionals. We also presented to our wider industry peers at IMEX Frankfurt in 2022, and some of their feedback is also included in this summary.



What are the (Future) trends, affecting association membership?

Here are the key trends as a result from our research:

Experiences with associations need to be smart. Technology with all its facets should be incorporated and used in order to achieve greater engagement and to meet the needs of future generations.

In post-pandemic times, the ROI of every investment needs to be maximised. Financial aspects play more of an important role than ever before, especially in the event industry as it was hit that hard by the pandemic.



Going new ways to expand the community might also be necessary. The question is whether paying for, and being part of a membership, is still necessary and/or how to include non-members as well.

Another issue is providing clear communication as well as our positioning with regards to ethics, diversity, and gender equality. Our industry is diverse in its roots but associations have to live that diversity as well.

What do the associations and their members say – we have their answers!

Here are the key trends from the roundtable discussions:

AMERICAS

Strong regional chapters allow for greater access to relevant information

Data-driven decision making is key

Need to build and maintain strong industry relations

Understand what members really want and how they behave



EMEA

Information can be consumed on your own, the physical meetings should add value (discussions, workshops etc.)

Content is KING. Experience is QUEEN with an emphasis on interaction

Association members are realigning their values and associations must match. What's your WHY?

Need to engage with all levels of membership

Communication to be more inclusive

APAC

Need for interaction and flexibility (even in Terms & Conditions of association memberships)

More education and training and knowledge sharing

Be more relevant in members everyday lives

Innovative event design

Association mergers

How to engage and interact more with Young Professionals?

Here are some ideas from the ICCA FLC on how to interact more with young professionals in your association:

- Provide discounts, packages or even exemptions for young professionals in registration fees
- Increase your visibility on social media that young professionals are active on, such as Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter.
- Create experiences that extend past the members' direct interaction with the association, and into their personal lives – volunteering opportunities, charity work, runs/ physical activity, creative competitions etc.
- Align with their values: the younger generation wants to belong in an organization that has, and practices, the same values as them. Show how you not only talk the talk but also walk the walk with sustainability for example.
- Communicate directly to young professionals: they want to contribute and influence the organization they belong to, rather than meekly following decisions.
- Young professionals in the industry are eager to have their voices heard, and once a chance is given, they will gladly contribute. Do not be afraid to involve them in meetings and projects. Take a look at your next meeting and consider if you can reach out to a younger team member to help diversify and challenge your team. If you don't have one – invite your FLC regional representative!



On-site discussion at IMEX Frankfurt 2022

We wanted to include feedback from our presentation discussions at IMEX, inspiring these questions and discussions.

What is your WHY to joining an association?

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The contents & resources: only through associations you can easily get a rounded content that is peer-reviewed and credible.

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The opportunity to meet fellow industry members & establish common grounds between one another.

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To make an impact on the industry.

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Have your membership expectations changed since the pandemic?

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Not because of the pandemic or the resulting financial difficulties, but because of the natural transition in position/role of the member: the needs you have when you are a young professional cannot be the same as those when you are a leader.

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Do industry associations complement each other or do they compete?

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Both. They complement each other in content & geographical locations and inspire, challenge and contribute to members' in different ways.

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There cannot be one generic industry association: numerous associations came into existence because there were demands for them.

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Is hybrid a threat or an opportunity?

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Depends: for associations, it is a great opportunity, for they can reach a greater audience than ever before via hybrid systems.

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For other areas of the meetings industry, we need to start thinking on what we can do to make hybrid an opportunity from a threat.

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