

AUTHOR CORRECTED PROOF

Defining Constructs to Evaluate the Benefits of Conferences

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Evaluating the benefits of conferences is an essential process for assessing the value produced by the activities of the conference. However, current evaluation tools in the sector remain underdeveloped, often focusing narrowly on delegate satisfaction and tourism outcomes, metrics that overlook the deeper, transformative potential of conferences. This article addresses this gap by introducing a set of empirically grounded constructs that define and categorize broader conference benefits. Drawing on 15 years of international research, the article identifies constructs relevant to three key communities—scientific, destination, and global—and offers a foundation for developing qualitative and quantitative research instruments. Each construct is derived from empirical evidence and grouped according to its primary beneficiary. The constructs presented serve as initial reference points that reflect current knowledge and aim to guide future research and practice in evaluating the broader value of conferences.

Key words: Event evaluation; Benefits; Constructs; Conferences; Social impact; Economic impact

Introduction

They generate dollars in the trillions and draw millions of participants annually (López, 2025; Tourism Economics, 2025), yet the true value of conferences remains largely invisible, overshadowed by tourism metrics and event satisfaction scores that fail to capture their full benefit and contribution to the advancement of economies and societies. As governments, universities, and other

institutions continue to invest in the global conference sector, the absence of robust frameworks to evaluate their broader benefits poses a critical challenge to evidence-based policy and sustainable funding decisions.

The contributions of conferences to visitor economies are well documented (Dwyer & Forsyth, 2019; Dwyer et al., 2000a; Jago & Dwyer, 2006; Mair et al., 2024). However interdisciplinary research indicates that conferences have a broader

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1 social benefit (Edwards et al., 2017; Foley et al.,
2 2013, 2021; Hansen et al., 2020; Hauss, 2021;
3 Reventlow-Mourier, 2022; Rödder & Braun, 2024;
4 Tan et al., 2024). Conferences serve as platforms
5 for generating direct and indirect benefits that
6 advance scientific knowledge (Flurey et al., 2015).

7 Conferences operate within a complex eco-
8 system of stakeholders, including associations,
9 policymakers, destination managers, convention
10 bureaus, venue operators, organizers, and suppli-
11 ers (Foley et al., 2021). Convention bureaus rely
12 on government funding for operation, promotion,
13 and securing bids (Lockstone-Binney et al., 2024).
14 Governments also play a crucial role in providing
15 the necessary infrastructure, such as convention and
16 exhibition venues, to attract and host conferences.
17 In return, public sector auditors require bureaus
18 to report visitor economy impacts generated by
19 conferences as a measure of return on investment
20 (Dwyer & Forsyth, 2019).

21 To meet these requirements, robust methodologies
22 have been developed and employed to estimate the
23 economic impact of conferences on host destinations
24 (Dwyer et al., 2000a; Foley, Edwards, & Schlenker,
25 2014; Foley et al. 2014a, 2014b; Hergesell & Foley,
26 2024; Jago, 2012; Jago & Dwyer, 2006; Mair et al.,
27 2024). These metrics have reinforced the perception
28 of conferences as economically valuable (Dwyer &
29 Forsyth, 2019), justifying continued public invest-
30 ment. Unfortunately, most jurisdictions continue to
31 focus solely on visitor economy impacts—partly
32 because they are easier to quantify and communi-
33 cate, but also because they are directly linked to the
34 geographic area and have traditionally served as a
35 basis for calculating return on investment (ROI)
36 (Cameron, cited in Foley et al., 2021). Despite the
37 increasing interest of governments in social impact
38 indicators (Dwyer, 2025; Department of Planning
39 and Environment, 2021; European Commission,
40 2014; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and
41 Development [OECD], 2023; Trebeck & Smith,
42 2024), measurement of the benefits of conferences
43 remains limited (Foley et al., 2021).

44 Capturing and reporting the benefits of confer-
45 ences is critical for three key reasons. First, without
46 a comprehensive understanding of the value confer-
47 ences generate for communities, the sector risks
48 losing institutional and public support, particularly
49 in the face of future disruptions such as climate

change, pandemics, or evolving travel behaviors
(Reventlow-Mourier, 2022). Second, it aligns with
increasing public expectations that conferences
address broader societal challenges, strengthening
the sector's social license and public legitimacy.
In this context, accurate reporting is not only an
ethical imperative but also a strategic response
to the demands of a more socially conscious and
globally connected world. Third, the resulting data
can guide stakeholders to design conferences with
greater intentionality, thereby enhancing their con-
tributions to community well-being. Despite these
imperatives, the sector continues to lack robust,
scalable research tools capable of systematically
capturing and evaluating the benefits of confer-
ences beyond visitor economy impacts.

This article addresses these challenges by pro-
posing a set of empirically grounded constructs for
understanding and evaluating the benefits of con-
ferences for scientific, destination, and global com-
munities. These constructs are intended to support
the development of comprehensive and meaningful
evaluation tools, serving as a foundation for both
qualitative and quantitative research.

Definitions and Scope

A conference is a formal gathering of individu-
als with shared interests, expertise, or goals, con-
vened to present, discuss, and exchange knowledge
on specific topics (Edwards et al., 2017). Typically
associated with professional associations, confer-
ences vary in scale from small, specialized meet-
ings to large international events. Gonzales-Santos
and Dimond (2015) distinguished conferences from
other meetings by describing them as structured
environments characterized by formal registration,
institutional settings, and intensive interactions.
Participants engage in both formal sessions (e.g.,
presentations, workshops) and informal exchanges,
creating a temporary but immersive social and
intellectual environment.

Unlike fixed location recurring events, confer-
ences are peripatetic. They move from one destina-
tion to another. This mobility amplifies their impact
on host cities, as each iteration brings an influx of
visitors, knowledge exchange, and cultural interac-
tion. The temporary concentration of expertise and
activity can generate significant ripple effects for

local communities, influencing economic activity, professional networks, and even policy agendas.

Conference benefits refer to the positive outcomes experienced by communities when a conference, or specific activities within it, enhances their well-being (Department of Planning and Environment, 2021; European Commission, 2014; OECD, 2023). These benefits can span scientific, health, environmental, social, cultural, and economic domains. They may be intentional (e.g., planned knowledge-sharing initiatives) or incidental (e.g., unanticipated collaborations) and often persist beyond the event's duration.

Evaluating these benefits requires clarity about the communities who benefit. Bradshaw (2008) defined a community as a network of individuals connected by shared identity, norms, or solidarity, regardless of geographic proximity. This definition accommodates both place-based communities (e.g., host city residents) and interest-based communities (e.g., professional or academic networks). Our research identifies three primary communities that may benefit from conferences.

Scientific communities comprise academics, practitioners, and other stakeholders connected by shared disciplinary interests (Mao et al., 2017). These communities are grounded in shared values and scientific methodologies, leveraging conferences to foster collaboration and drive knowledge advancement (Kornfeld & Hewitt, 1981). As Dawson and Topham (2020) noted, scientific communities are central to “community-building, practice, and identity” (p. 3) within their fields.

Destination communities include individuals who live and/or work in the location where the conference is held, including vulnerable or underrepresented groups. These communities may also include transient populations such as international students who contribute to the local, social, and economic fabric (Bradshaw, 2008).

Global communities encompass humanity at large, connected through international networks and shared challenges. Issues such as climate change and pandemics underscore the need for global cooperation. Global communities are supported by international organizations working across borders to address collective problems and promote global well-being.

While a comprehensive evaluation of conference impacts would consider both benefits and costs

(Dwyer et al., 2000a), this article focuses specifically on the benefits that contribute to the well-being of the three communities. For a detailed discussion of potential social and economic costs including, for example, disruption to resident lifestyles, crowding, interruption of normal business, and underutilized infrastructure, see Dwyer et al. (2000a). For environmental costs including carbon emissions and resource waste see Leochico et al. (2021).

Developing Constructs

Constructs are abstract concepts that are precisely defined to enable measurement and operationalization (MacInnis, 2011, p. 141). They play a critical role in representing knowledge, facilitating the comparison of perspectives, and supporting the systematic exchange of information (MacInnis, 2011; Polites et al., 2012). In the context of event management research, social impact concepts are often referred to as “intangibles” (Dwyer et al., 2000b; Preuss, 2007; Wallstam et al., 2020; Wood, 2006) and little progress has been made in developing constructs specifically tailored to measure the intangible benefits of conferences (Foley et al., 2021; Tham, 2023).

Some advancement has occurred in the domain of leisure events, including festivals and sporting events (Bachman et al., 2022; Wada, 2024; Wallstam et al., 2020; Wood, 2006; Woosnam et al., 2013). For instance, Wallstam et al. (2020) employed the Delphi method to identify key social impact constructs that reflect both positive and negative change, including community pride, social capital, and quality of life. Similarly, Wood (2006) developed a multi-item scale to measure civic pride, arguing that single-item measures are insufficient for capturing complex social phenomena. Constructs like “psychic income” have also been operationalized and validated across various sporting contexts (Chen & Lin, 2021; Kim & Walker, 2012; Liu, 2017; Mourão et al., 2022; Oja et al., 2018; Wada, 2024). Delaney (2025) noted there may be scope to apply the concept of psychic income to association conferences in some instances.

While both leisure and business events require reliable and valid constructs, those developed for leisure contexts may not be directly transferable to conferences. For instance, the concept of civic

1 pride, often relevant in festivals or sporting events,
2 may hold less significance in the context of confer-
3 ences, which typically occur with limited visibility
4 to the broader community (Delaney, 2025). Confer-
5 ence attendees may feel a sense of belonging
6 within a professional or academic community, but
7 this is rarely tied to the host destination. Further-
8 more, while the constructs and indicators devel-
9 oped for social impact research in festivals and
10 sports have typically focused on destination com-
11 munities (see Hollis, 2025, for measures of mega-
12 events), the benefits of conferences extend beyond
13 the host location to include scientific and global
14 communities.

15 Identifying appropriate constructs for evaluating
16 the benefits of conferences requires a comprehen-
17 sive and context-sensitive approach. Drawing on
18 empirical data collected between 2010 and 2025
19 (see Table 1), this study explores the multifaceted
20 nature of conference benefits. The focus of this arti-
21 cle is on the initial stage of construct development:
22 identifying and defining a set of constructs that can
23 inform the design of future research instruments.

24 The Data

25
26
27 The authors' collaborative projects and strate-
28 gic partnerships investigating conference benefits
29 include a series of empirical studies based in Aus-
30 tralia, UK, Europe, North America, South America,
31 South Africa, and Southeast Asia (Table 1). Data
32 were collected from 2010 to 2025 using a range of
33 methods including in-depth interviews, online sur-
34 veys, and secondary data analysis (Table 1). Around
35 9,000 conference attendees (including delegates,
36 organizers, and exhibitors) from a broad range of
37 industry sectors have contributed to the data. Table 1
38 provides an overview of the studies, the benefits
39 studied, and the methodological approach applied.

40 Ethical approval for each of these studies was
41 secured from the Human Research Ethics Commit-
42 tee at the University of Technology Sydney.

43 For this article, we synthesized seven indepen-
44 dent data sets collected over 15 years across mul-
45 tiple regions and sectors (Table 1) using a thematic
46 analysis approach. This process involved interro-
47 gating qualitative and quantitative inputs to identify
48 recurring patterns and relationships across the data.
49 To mitigate potential bias, coding was conducted

iteratively by members of the research team, with
discrepancies discussed and resolved. We also
incorporated reflexivity by critically examining
constructs that emerged from our own prior stud-
ies to ensure they were not privileged over other
sources. From this analysis, we developed two key
outputs: (1) a set of conference benefit constructs
that capture the diverse ways conferences gener-
ate value; and (2) categories of beneficiaries that
delineate for whom these benefits occur. By inte-
grating multiple sources, this synthesis provides a
comprehensive framework for understanding not
only what benefits occur but also for whom they
are realized.

The following section provides an overview of
the research journey and results. We discuss the
research findings of conference benefits for scien-
tific, destination and global communities, provid-
ing supporting evidence from the empirical data.

The Research Journey

This research program began in 2010, when the
authors were approached by a convention bureau
seeking to better understand the benefits of confer-
ences beyond their tourism-related contributions.
The first project used a qualitative, case study
approach to explore this relatively underresearched
area. Interviews were conducted with key stake-
holders, including organizers, association board
members, delegates, sponsors, and exhibitors,
across five conferences, revealing a diverse range
of benefits (project 1).

Building on the initial insights, we adopted a
quantitative approach to estimate the extent to
which these benefits were realized (projects 4 and
5). A series of studies were conducted using online
questionnaires distributed to the full population
of conference participants, including academic
and practitioner delegates, organizers, exhibitors,
sponsors, and others. These conferences spanned
a variety of sectors, including health, science, IT,
agriculture, engineering and technology, profes-
sional services, and culture. Early findings iden-
tified significant benefits for both scientific and
destination communities, which were subsequently
confirmed in later studies.

To further investigate conference benefits, we
coordinated the development of nine international

Table 1
Research Projects on Conference Benefits 2010–2025

	Method	Years	Focus	Benefited Communities	Key Related (Un)Published Outputs
1	Case study research: In-depth interviews; document analysis of conference reports and websites Australia, $N = 5$ case studies	2010	Scoping out the broader benefits of conferences	Scientific Destination Global	Edwards et al. (2011), Foley et al. (2010, 2013)
2	Case study research: In-depth interviews with researchers in medicine, biology, physics and engineering, policy makers and industry leaders Australia $N = 11$ case studies	2017	Identifying the long tail benefits of conferences	Scientific Destination Global	Edwards et al. (2017), Edwards, Foley, and Hergesell (2022)
3	Case study research: Secondary data analysis (statistics, internal documents, websites, social media, news and media reports), in-depth interviews and surveys with key stakeholders including delegates, associations, conference organizers, venues and representatives of government bodies (methods dependent on case study) Americas, Asia, Australia, Europe, UK $N = 9$ case studies	2016–2020	Identifying wide range of conference benefits	Scientific Destination	du Cros et al. (2017), Foley et al. (2017, 2018, 2019, 2021), Gambina et al. (2018), Hansen (2018), Harrison et al. (2019) José Alvez et al. (2019) Mohamed Nor (2017), Scaglione and Dimitriou (2018), Thiebault (2017)
4	Cross-conference online surveys of attendees at international conferences Australia, Canada, South Africa, South Korea $N = 1,705$	2010–2014	Measuring and comparing type and frequency of conference benefits across multiple destinations	Scientific Destination	Foley, Edwards, and Schlenker (2014), Foley et al. (2014a, 2014b)
5	Multiple follow-on projects: Cross-conference online surveys of attendees at international conferences Australia $N = 1,110$; $N_b = 1,404$	2014–2020	Measuring selected benefits of conferences	Scientific Destination	Edwards et al. (2016, 2019), Foley et al. (2019)
6	Multiple follow-on projects: Cross-conference online surveys of attendees at domestic conferences Australia $N_a = 70$; $N_b = 122$; $N_c = 838$	2020–2022	Measuring and comparing benefits of face to face, hybrid and virtual conferences, and the impact of COVID-19	Scientific Destination	Edwards (2017), Edwards, Foley, and Hergesell (2022) Foley et al. (2020)
7	Multiple follow-on projects Cross-conference online surveys of attendees Australia $N_a = 1,682$; $N_b = 1,060$	2023–2025	Measuring benefit expectations and actual conference benefits	Scientific Destination	Foley et al. (2024, 2025), Hergesell and Foley (2024, 2025)

case studies of conference legacies with contributions from the Americas, Asia, Australia, Europe, and UK (project 3). Building on the findings from the qualitative and quantitative research projects, the following sections explore in greater depth the specific benefits conferences have directly on two key stakeholder groups: scientific communities and destination communities and indirectly on global communities. These benefits are presented with empirical evidence from our projects, highlighting the multifaceted value conferences deliver across a range of dimensions.

In the context of current government and industry priorities, the economic contributions of conferences continue to be an important consideration. Governments and industry stakeholders

emphasize the role of conferences in driving tourism, stimulating trade, and attracting local investment, positioning these activities as key levers for economic growth and regional development. While the purpose of this article is to capture the multifaceted value of conferences, it is not prudent to overlook these economic dimensions, given their prominence in government discourse and their influence on funding, strategic planning, and destination marketing. Accordingly, we have included an economic construct in the table of construct definitions, alongside additional domains such as social, cultural, and knowledge-based impacts (see Table 2). This inclusion ensures that conference evaluation reflects both the prevailing priorities of decision-makers and the broader scholarly

Table 2
Construct Definitions for Scientific, Destination, and Global Communities

Constructs for scientific communities (delegates, organizers, exhibitors)

Recognition	The visibility and regard gained via presentations, exhibitions and other activities at the conference that enhance reputation.
New knowledge	The information, insights, skills, techniques, technologies and transformational understanding that attendees acquire by attending the conference.
Strengthened networks	Enhanced professional and interpersonal relationships that develop through repeated or meaningful social and collaborative interactions, facilitated by conferences.
Collaboration	Partnerships and cooperative efforts initiated during or after a conference, as a result of participants from diverse backgrounds and/or organizations connecting over shared interests and goals.

Constructs for destination communities

Innovation in professional practice	Taking knowledge, ideas, techniques or technology from the conference into practice and research to improve outcomes for destination communities.
Business opportunities	Opportunities for the advancement of trade, investment, strategic partnerships, market expansion, and/or client acquisition that emerge through social interactions, networking, and exposure to innovations during the conference.
Support for vulnerable communities	Support given to communities who are at a higher risk of experiencing social, economic, or health-related challenges. Support can include raising awareness, policy advocacy, empowerment, capacity building, and resource mobilization.
Attraction of global talent	The recruitment of skilled professionals from outside the host destination to work or study in the host destination as a result of attending the conference.
Uplifted destination image	The positioning and recognition of a destination as a center for creativity, technological advancement, and knowledge exchange, brought about by hosting conferences.
Cultural regeneration	Renewed appreciation of local traditions, cultural assets and creative industries stimulated by the conference. Cultural regeneration may also refer to increased recognition of First Nations perspectives.
Contribution to visitor economy	The direct, indirect, and induced financial benefits generated for the host economy through attendee and organizer expenditure that would not have occurred if the conference had not been held in the destination.

Constructs for global communities

Scientific advancement	Innovation in scientific knowledge or technology that leads to a shift in understanding or capability at a global level.
Industry innovation	New knowledge, ideas, technique, technology, products, services, processes, or business models to improve efficiency and value for global industries.
Improved social programs	Enhancement and refinement of public and private sector organization strategies, programs, and regulations aimed at addressing global issues and improving the well-being of individuals and communities.

imperative to conceptualize conferences as complex, multidimensional phenomena. By doing so, we aim to provide a comprehensive basis for theory development and practice that aligns with policy and industry contexts while advancing a more holistic understanding of benefits arising from the conference sector.

Benefits for Scientific Communities

Our empirical research consistently demonstrated that conferences generate a range of significant benefits for scientific communities. These include the development of professional capability, the strengthening of professional networks, the formation of new partnerships, and the enhancement of professional recognition.

Among the most consistently reported outcomes is professional capability development. Across multiple studies (projects 1, 4, 5, 7), the majority of respondents indicated that conferences exposed them to new insights, knowledge, ideas, techniques, materials, and technologies. In project 4, 96% of the respondents agreed they had gained new knowledge and ideas, 93% noted they had disseminated new techniques and technologies to their workplaces, and 85% of respondents highlighted conference benefits specifically for early career professionals. These quantitative findings are supported by collected qualitative data, with delegates describing how conferences introduced them to innovative research, new data analysis methods, and emerging clinical practices. As one organizer observed, clinicians often gain valuable insights from industry representatives who demonstrate the latest products and technologies (project 1).

In addition to individual learning, conferences serve as critical platforms for building and strengthening professional friendships and networks. In project 4, 94% of 1,457 respondents reported that their networks were enhanced through conference participation, with 61% forming new research collaborations and 57% establishing business partnerships. These networks are not only instrumental for collaboration but also foster a sense of scientific community. Lomnitz (1983) described conferences as “rituals of tribal allegiance,” essential to the feeling of belonging within a professional field. This sentiment was echoed in recent

research (project 3), which highlights the role of conferences as shared social contexts that facilitate meaningful professional and interpersonal interactions. Such relationships are foundational to a well-functioning international research ecosystem, enabling the exchange of knowledge and resources, and supporting long-term collaboration and impact (de Jong et al., 2014; González-Santos & Dimond, 2015; Levesque et al., 2017).

The informal and formal interactions that occur at conferences also create fertile ground for new partnerships. Wagner and Leydesdorff (2005) argued that most international collaborations originate in the rich communicative environments of conferences and research sites. Conferences bring together key stakeholders and decision-makers, making them ideal events for emerging companies, start-ups, and researchers to engage with prospective investors, clients, and strategic partners. Our research supports this claim showing that these interactions have led to tangible outcomes such as funding, market entry support, and joint ventures (projects 1, 2 and 3). For example, one of our case studies examined how the founder of an Australian company producing seaweed-based health and skincare products used international conferences to explore global trends, learn from peers, and secure government and private investment to grow their business (project 2).

Recognition is another critical benefit of conference participation (Foley et al., 2021). Presenting research, leading sessions, or exhibiting innovations can significantly enhance a delegate’s professional visibility (Foley et al., 2021). This is particularly valuable for early career researchers and those from less prominent institutions (de Leon & McQuillin, 2020, p. 191), who may benefit from increased citations and new collaborative opportunities. de Leon and McQuillin (2020) found that presenting at the American Political Science Association Annual Meetings significantly increased the likelihood of articles being cited, especially for those outside elite academic institutions. For more established scholars, conferences serve as a form of professional “advertising,” further boosting their academic profiles (de Leon & McQuillin, 2020, p. 191).

Conferences also provide a platform for local researchers and practitioners to showcase their expertise to a global audience, thereby enhancing

1 both individual and regional reputations. For
2 instance, the Swiss Fintech Corner at the SIBOS
3 conference in Geneva elevated the profile of local
4 startups and positioned Geneva as a hub of fin-
5 tech innovation (project 3). Similarly, studies of
6 academic conferences in Denmark, Scotland, the
7 Netherlands, and Sweden confirm that host institu-
8 tions often experienced enhanced recognition, with
9 particularly strong outcomes for local academics
10 (Gambina et al., 2018; Hansen, 2018; Hansen et al.,
11 2020; Scaglione & Dimitriou, 2018).

12 These benefits—capability development, net-
13 working, partnerships, and recognition—are
14 deeply interconnected. They underscore the pro-
15 found and enduring value that conferences offer to
16 scientific communities. However, the benefits of
17 conferences extend well beyond the academic and
18 research domains. The following section explores
19 how conferences also generate significant and last-
20 ing benefits for destination communities, shaping
21 local economies, cultures, and social outcomes.

22 *Benefits for Destination Communities*

24 Empirical findings indicate that conferences gen-
25 erate a wide range of benefits for destination com-
26 munities. These include innovation in professional
27 practice, business opportunities, support for vulner-
28 able communities, attraction of global talent, enhance-
29 ment of destination image, and cultural regeneration.

30 One of the most immediate and tangible ben-
31 efits for destination communities we noted is the
32 enhancement of professional practice (projects
33 1–7). Conferences provide access to cutting-edge
34 knowledge and skills for local practitioners who
35 may not have the resources to attend events outside
36 of their own destination, region or country. This
37 proximity allows a greater number of local pro-
38 fessionals to benefit from the latest developments
39 in their fields. For instance, a heart health confer-
40 ence in Sweden enabled local nurses to return to
41 their communities with improved knowledge and
42 clinical skills (project 3). Similarly, an orthodon-
43 tics conference in Sydney equipped local practi-
44 tioners with advanced techniques and technologies
45 that were immediately applied in their practices,
46 directly benefiting patients (project 1).

47 Conferences play a strategic role in attracting
48 global talent, a critical asset in knowledge-driven
49

economies. Our research shows they foster talent
development and often encourage relocation to
host destinations (projects 3 and 5). This attraction
is often driven by a combination of factors, includ-
ing the perceived quality of life in the host desti-
nation, the vibrancy of local industry sectors, and
the professional networks formed during the event.
As Lee and Back (2005) and Zhang et al. (2007)
argued, conferences contribute to destination
branding, with attendees' experiences shaping their
perceptions of the host city. These perceptions, in
turn, influence decisions to live, work, or study in
the destination. In project 5b, 56% of the nonresi-
dent respondents expressed interest in relocating
for work or study, and 4% were actively pursuing
such opportunities. Delegate sentiments support
this finding. For example, one delegate noted, "My
experience of Sydney has transformed my per-
spective on the city. It is a vibrant hub that offers a
wealth of opportunities to utilize my skills" (proj-
ect 7). Another remarked, "I would like to study or
work in the hospitals of Sydney . . . there are a lot
of places and people from whom you can learn a
lot and make your own contribution to science and
medicine development that can be significant glob-
ally" (project 5).

In addition to attracting global talent, confer-
ences also stimulate business opportunities. These
opportunities are vital to economic growth and are
often central to national and regional development
strategies. Conferences serve as dynamic platforms
for showcasing emerging technologies, cultivat-
ing stakeholder relationships, and enhancing brand
visibility. For instance, Swiss fintech startups par-
ticipating in the SIBOS conference in Geneva were
able to present their innovations to international
banking stakeholders, significantly expanding their
market reach and credibility (project 3). Similarly,
London Tech Week, a series of conferences, exhibi-
tions, and activations organized by London & Part-
ners, has attracted substantial foreign investment to
the city while strengthening connections within the
local tech ecosystem (project 3).

Conferences have a meaningful role in support-
ing vulnerable communities. Some are explicitly
designed to address the needs of marginalized
populations, fostering knowledge exchange, advoca-
cy, and long-term change. A prominent example
is the International AIDS Conferences, which have

significantly contributed to reducing stigma and advancing clinical treatment for AIDS-affected communities worldwide (projects 1 and 2). Other conferences embed initiatives into their programming that directly support destination communities. At the 2016 ICCA conference in Kuching, Malaysia, delegates donated hundreds of children’s books to a local literacy charity and organized visits to the Semenggoh Nature Reserve, raising awareness and funds for orangutan rehabilitation (project 3).

Our quantitative studies support these case study insights. Seventy percent of the respondents who attended one of the international conferences in Sydney in 2023 and 2024 agreed the events contributed to improving circumstances for vulnerable communities (project 7). Many highlighted efforts to improve outcomes for marginalized and at-risk populations. Respondents noted that conferences provided a platform for underrepresented voices, including delegates from low- and middle-income countries who were sponsored to attend.

Cultural regeneration represents another important dimension of conference benefits. Conferences can promote local identity to international audiences, stimulate investment in cultural infrastructure, and foster community engagement through integrated cultural programming. In Sydney, conferences held in 2023 and 2024 featured welcome ceremonies, keynote addresses, and presentations that were led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders. Attendees reported increased understanding and appreciation of Indigenous perspectives and contributions (project 7). One delegate reflected, “Excellent examples of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and representation—starting to feel like the seat at the table is genuine, respect is sincere, and voice is being heard. Still a long way to go but so much better” (project 7).

Together, these findings illustrate the diverse benefits that conferences can have on destination communities, acting as important catalysts, delivering a range of benefits to destination communities—from professional development and economic stimulation to cultural enrichment and social inclusion.

While these immediate and localized benefits are significant, conferences also generate longer-term, often less visible and indirect outcomes that unfold over time. As part of our research, we invited

respondents to share insights on benefits not captured in the closed-ended questions. Many noted that while some conference benefits are immediate, others take time to materialize (projects 4, 5, and 7). The following section explores these long-tail benefits, with a particular focus on how conferences contribute to global communities through sustained scientific, social, and policy advancements.

Global Communities and Benefits Over Time

Our findings indicate that the peak time for benefits for scientific communities is during the conference itself—for instance, the acquisition of new knowledge and the strengthening of professional networks. These networks, however, can be long lasting, as attendees continue to develop and nurture professional relationships over time, often leading to sustained collaboration and knowledge exchange well beyond the event. In contrast, destination communities typically experience most benefits in the weeks and months following the event, such as when local practitioners adopt new innovations or when international talent relocates to the host region. For global communities, the effects can take longer to emerge, reflecting more gradual and diffuse processes of influence.

To explore the long-tail benefits for global communities we conducted a series of qualitative studies (project 2). These studies revealed how delegates and associations leveraged conferences to generate significant long-term outcomes.

Scientific advancement has emerged as a significant global benefit derived from conference participation with consistently over 90% of delegates across multiple studies agreeing that conferences contributed to this outcome (projects 5 and 7). Long-tail research identified breakthroughs catalyzed by conferences in the areas of health, astrophysics, renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, agriculture, and education. One notable example is the development of a vaccine to prevent cervical cancer, first conceptualized at a conference in Australia (project 2). This innovation ultimately led to improved global health outcomes, with Australia projected to eliminate cervical cancer between 2028 and 2035, and other high-income countries expected to follow (Davies-Oliveira et al., 2021). The World Health Organization is now working to

1 eliminate cervical cancer in low- to middle-income
2 countries (Abbas et al., 2024).

3 Conferences also play a critical role in driving
4 industry innovation, a central focus of national
5 development strategies (Australian Government,
6 2024a; European Commission, 2024; Oates, 2016).
7 Across our recent projects (5 and 7), between 88%
8 and 93% of respondents agreed that the events con-
9 tributed to industry innovation. Long-tail case stud-
10 ies like the one on the Australian cotton industry
11 (project 2), confirm these benefits. They facilitate
12 cross-sectoral knowledge exchange in areas such
13 as health, agriculture, energy, advanced manufact-
14 uring, cybersecurity, and mining (project 2). As
15 most innovation occurs through diffusion (Austra-
16 lian Government, 2024b), conferences act as cata-
17 lysts by bringing together diverse participants and
18 enabling access to novel, nonredundant informa-
19 tion (Haus, 2021). The cotton conferences exem-
20 plify this benefit as they specifically aim to connect
21 farmers with scientists and cutting-edge research.
22 This collaboration led to the adoption of sustain-
23 able practices, including significant reductions
24 in pesticide use (Wilson et al., 2018), and a 50%
25 decrease in water usage per bale between 1996
26 and 2020 (Cotton Australia, 2025). As such, these
27 innovations have improved the environmental foot-
28 print of cotton production in Australia and globally
29 (Conaty et al., 2022).

30 Conferences are expanding beyond their core
31 purpose of academic and professional functions
32 to actively engage with pressing social issues. The
33 International AIDS Conferences, for instance, dem-
34 onstrate how conferences can serve as platforms
35 for advocacy and policy influence. Since 1985,
36 these gatherings have not only facilitated scientific
37 exchange but have also catalyzed global and national
38 policy reforms, directly contributing to improved
39 access to life-saving treatments (project 2).

40 Overall, conferences empower attendees with
41 the knowledge, tools, and networks needed to drive
42 meaningful change in their communities and beyond.

43 The Constructs

44
45 The research provides a deeper understand-
46 ing of the complex nature of conferences and the
47 various frameworks that can be used to assess their
48 social benefit. By analyzing both qualitative and
49

quantitative data across multiple sectors and geo-
graphic locations, we identified a set of constructs
that highlight the diverse value propositions con-
ferences bring to three key communities: scientific,
destination, and global.

Table 2 presents a set of benefit constructs,
defined and grounded in empirical data, which
may serve as a foundational framework for future
research. The constructs are grouped by the com-
munity they affect. This clustering ensures con-
textual relevance for a range of stakeholders and
supports a more focused definition of each bene-
fit. The definitions presented in Table 2 provide a
structured foundation for understanding the organi-
zation and significance of the constructs.

There are a few additional considerations that
may help to guide the design of subsequent stud-
ies. First, the constructs are not mutually exclusive;
rather, they are intricately connected. For instance,
the generation of new knowledge and the formation
of collaborations within the scientific community
can directly influence both industry innovation and
scientific advancement. Likewise, strengthened net-
works and uplifted destination images are likely to
influence the attraction of global talent. This means
that the benefits for each of the communities (sci-
entific, destination, and global) are linked to, and
in some cases reliant on, the benefits that accrue for
the other communities (see Fig. 1). For example,
innovation in professional practice at a destination
level can lead to global innovation. The strength-
ened networks and collaborations that benefit scien-
tific communities underpin scientific advancement
for global communities. Conversely, scientific
advancement for global communities can result
in recognition for those in scientific communities.
These considerations are reflected in a proposed
Conference Impact Constructs Model (Fig. 1).

The relationships between constructs warrants
careful attention as the constructs are operational-
ized, validated, and refined for the development of
research tools.

Second, the benefits associated with each con-
struct are dynamic and may differ in extent over
time. Innovations in professional practice often
generate increasing returns as they are progres-
sively adopted by broader segments of the commu-
nity, resulting in improved outcomes. Similarly, the
cumulative effect of multiple conferences is likely

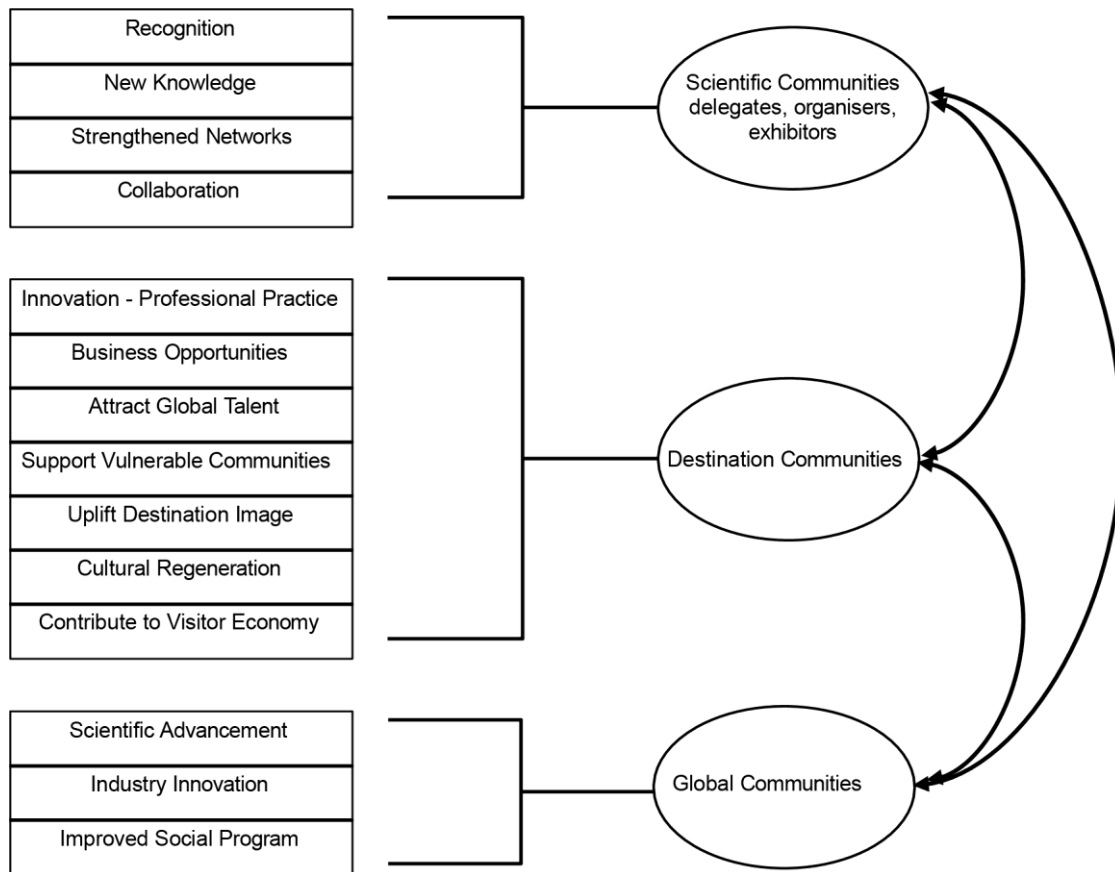


Figure 1. Conference impact constructs model.

to intensify the benefits experienced both within the host destination and across international professional networks. To rigorously assess and interpret these evolving and aggregated impacts, longitudinal research designs will be critical.

While the constructs presented provide a foundation for evaluating conference benefits, potential cultural and sectoral variations should also be considered. For example, benefits may manifest differently in corporate versus academic conferences or across regions with distinct cultural and professional norms (see, e.g., Shavitt et al., 2006). Recognizing these variations will be important for cross-context validation and ensuring the constructs have relevance and applicability across diverse settings.

Further investigation into both the interrelationships among constructs and their temporal

development could inform the creation of “process indicators” (de Jong et al., 2014, p. 90). If short-term indicators such as new knowledge and strengthened networks (for example) can be shown to reliably predict long-term benefits like scientific advancement, these early indicators might serve as proxies for long-term indirect benefits. This approach could reduce the reliance on resource-intensive longitudinal studies, offering a more efficient and scalable pathway to evaluating the benefits of conferences.

Conclusion

This article has argued that while international conferences are widely acknowledged for their substantial contributions to visitor economies, their wider benefits remain insufficiently understood

1 and inadequately measured. The prevailing reli-
2 ance on tourism metrics has obscured the more
3 transformative benefits conferences can generate,
4 ranging from scientific advancement and industry
5 innovation to support for vulnerable communities
6 and policy influence.

7 The theoretical contribution of this article is a set
8 of empirically grounded benefit constructs designed
9 to facilitate more comprehensive and repeatable
10 evaluations of conference outcomes. These con-
11 structs offer a practical framework for capturing
12 the multifaceted benefits of conferences, one that
13 enables stakeholders to move beyond surface-level
14 assessments such as event satisfaction and tourism
15 spend and toward a more holistic understanding of
16 conference value creation. They work by providing
17 concepts that can be systematically applied to iden-
18 tify, measure, and interpret diverse forms of value
19 generated through conferences, making evalua-
20 tions more consistent and insightful across differ-
21 ent contexts.

22 However, to fully realize the potential of this
23 framework, future research must focus on develop-
24 ing and testing measurement instruments based on
25 the proposed constructs, including reliability and
26 validity assessments. There is also scope for apply-
27 ing advanced analytical techniques such as network
28 analysis and structural equation modeling to explore
29 causal pathways, interdependencies, and the cumu-
30 lative effects of conference participation over time.

31 The constructs may be useful for government
32 and industry stakeholders who require robust eval-
33 uation tools to support evidence-based investment
34 decisions and justify continued public and private
35 sector support. For conference organizers and des-
36 tination managers, such tools can inform strategic
37 planning, enhance event design, and demonstrate
38 long-term benefits for diverse audiences. Further
39 research could explore how these tools can be inte-
40 grated into existing policy frameworks and funding
41 models to strengthen the sector's social license and
42 accountability.

43 The study draws on data from conference attend-
44 ees from around the world and across a broad
45 range of industry sectors. However, the find-
46 ings are not without limitations. The conference
47 attendees who completed the questionnaires and
48 in-depth interviews may represent a skewed subset
49 of participants and therefore may not fully reflect

the broader attendee population. Nonetheless, the
large sample size ($N > 9,000$) helps mitigate this
concern. In addition, the data used to develop the
constructs were drawn primarily from international
association conferences. Future research should
therefore seek to validate these constructs across a
wider range of conference types, including corpo-
rate, governmental, and hybrid formats, and among
more diverse stakeholder groups such as policy-
makers, local residents, and virtual participants.






In addition, the data have been drawn primar-
ily from on-site attendees. Further investigation is
needed to understand the different benefits that may
occur as a result of online attendance, particularly
in light of the climate crisis and the potential for
future pandemics. This line of inquiry is essential
for developing sustainable and resilient models of
conference participation that facilitate social bene-
fits while addressing environmental considerations.

The constructs and their definitions (see Table 2)
are starting points that accurately reflect current
knowledge. Further research is needed to opera-
tionalize, validate, and refine these constructs, tak-
ing into account the temporally dynamic nature of
conference benefits. Longitudinal studies and the
development of process indicators could help iden-
tify early predictors of long-term benefits, offering
scalable alternatives to resource-intensive evalua-
tions. These stages are crucial for ensuring that
constructs attain relevance and applicability across
diverse contexts (Costa et al., 2021; Kapoutsis et al.,
2017). Ultimately, recognizing and evaluating the
full spectrum of conference benefits is not merely
an academic exercise. It is a necessary step toward
unlocking the potential of conferences as engines of
innovation, collaboration, and social progress.

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