

ICCA Association Expert Seminar (AES)

20-22 May 2023 | Frankfurt, Germany



Of the Quintuple Helix, Sustainability and Positive Changes

How does the Quintuple Helix feature in the international meetings industry?

This enigmatic question was explored in a Fish Bowl discussion during ICCA's 20th Association Expert Seminar (ICCA AES) from 20-22 May 2023 at the Metropolitan Hotel by Flemings, Frankfurt. The sold-out event saw 24 international associations and 77 ICCA member organisations from 38 countries in a 1.5 day programme comprising creative artistry, group discussions, case studies, 'how-to', debates, candid conversations and expert presentations.

Discussion centred around powering the quintuple helix to the mutual benefit of associations and the communities hosting their events. The quintuple helix is a concept embraced by many governments which posits that economic and social development is stronger when government, industry, academia and civil society collaborate and do so with an eye on the fifth strand of the helix, which is environmental sustainability. With its theme: "Association Success, Sustainability and Legacies" veteran AES moderator Gary Grimmer, CICE (GainingEdge) in his 20th gig, and supported by association and industry experts Geneviève Leclerc, CMP (#MEET4IMPACT) and Deanna Varga, CICE (MayvinGlobal) took the participants through a range of the most talked-about topics in the international meetings industry.

Disruption: Curse or Opportunity?

In the discussion on disruption in the meetings industry, Gary Grimmer set the stage by exploring that disruption could be both positive and negative. He said that associations need to think proactively about potentially damaging disruptions to their communities, but also about opportunities that disruption can create. Even the Covid-19 global pandemic can be viewed as a positive Disruptor which led to hybrid events and opening accessibility and the inclusion of diverse, minority and members from developing economies. Consequently, association members expected and wanted more services, leading to a more robust association community, product development, regional events and more regional sponsorship revenue for some associations.

Revenue Generation and Commercial Thinking

Deanna Varga took the participants through various approaches to building sustainable funding for associations, be it more sponsors, diversified revenue sources, or new business models. In her session “Revenue Generation and Commercial Thinking”, she drove home the need for all organisations to develop their own Risk Appetite statement which will help them make risk-informed decisions with regards to the allocation of resources, management controls, and potential consequences or impacts to reduce unexpected losses. This is important because the level of risk that an association is willing to take on will define its risk response strategies.

Most associations depend on membership fees and events as main revenue sources. However, there are indications that the value proposition of membership is gradually changing to a subscription model. Whilst the catch-all membership model includes member database, communications, events and content for all members, associations will need to consider taking this to the next level and giving their members a choice if they want to pay for more benefits. When there are different levels of access to services and benefits, the association can have a more diverse membership base while members can make multiple payments for prolonged and recurring access to the products and services they actually need.

Each association should know if and how each of their revenue and profit streams are changing. Their own members are a valuable source of information and ideas, and should be tapped into through engagements which seek member sentiment feedback (for example: which benefits are most/least valuable to them, etc.) Some associations are branching into education and accreditation services, licensing or consultancy services as examples. Per event-basis sponsorship can morph into a long-term, annual partnerships for a deeper richer and more sustainable relationship that focuses on outcomes or problem solving. Affiliate marketing is yet another option for associations to diversify their revenue stream.

The World Café group discussion facilitated by Varga on association revenue brought to light an interesting array of practices currently undertaken to improve existing revenue streams. In one case, as virtual education has a greater outreach, and even non-members, especially those in developing and low-income countries, are participating in these educational sessions, one association addressed this sector of developing and low-income countries who are non-members, by creating a new membership category called “friend of the association”. The membership fee was 25% cheaper as these ‘friends’ could only access a certain portion of overall benefits. However, this move led to new members and a new revenue stream whilst fulfilling the association’s social impact goal to be more inclusive.

Another association used its high-profile members as speakers to attract more audiences and leverage from their networks. Associations can also increase revenue from the commercial sector by creating a membership tier that doesn’t allow voting but still leverages on commercial partners who want to be involved in the association from a business perspective.

In the ensuing discussion on how associations are planning to explore new revenue streams, some ideas were fielded. These include exploring growing demand for education, particularly with online certification courses with outside partners; consideration to address a gap in the memberships (new audiences) and assisting member countries to allow individual members to form a group or network (and being part of a community); and looking to diversify types of corporate funds, for example endorsement fees. Associations are also exploring new partnerships outside their industries to grow sponsorship opportunities. One association shared that it will explore the value of their non-member data as a potential new revenue source. Another suggestion included consideration for a valuable mentor-mentee programme which can be mid to long-term in nature. Varga went on to suggest reading about the IBM/Wimbledon partnership as one good example of partnership problem-solving. More details of this case study are [here](#).

Synergy Between Association Legacies, Sustainability and UNSDGs

Putting more focus on association legacies will help sustain associations as well as the environment as legacies form an important nexus with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs.) Within the meetings industry, there is much talk about 'social impacts'. Geneviève Leclerc offered these definitions:

- A change or positive outcome on a societal problem or condition
- A new social asset or new common knowledge
- Responding to an existing gap in knowledge or solutions
- Giving back to society through conscious and deliberate efforts by businesses and organisations.

Citing the "footprint vs handprint" analogy, Leclerc urged participants to focus not only on mitigating the effects of travelling to conventions and business events but also creating value through the conventions organised by associations and attended by their members. A 'successful' convention is then differently defined when return on objectives (ROO) are sought because of the positive impacts from legacies left behind. One way of reporting impact is to use the UNSDG targets (see www.globalgoals.org) framework which provides guidance on prescribed targets and associated indicators for the 17 goals. Critically, ICCA members and the supplier community play an important role to help their clients achieve their vision of creating impact. Using the 'logic model' framework, Leclerc guided the participants on how to develop long-lasting impact from the conventions they plan and organise.

Workshops on Visioning, Planning, Implementing and Measuring Impacts

The related workshops took the participants through the 'logic model' framework, starting with

impact visioning ('what is the big vision of creating change?') to setting impact goals (short and long-term measurable goals linked to the vision); and from strategies adopted to tactics implemented to drive the sought impacts. In other words, once the meeting legacy goals are set, the next step is to create specific meeting activities that will help ensure that the goals are achieved.

Last but not least, the workshops also covered the all-important impact measurement or measuring results towards achieving that big 'change' vision. One useful tip for measuring such impacts, which in some cases are intangible or qualitative, is to use indicators which are outcome focused.

In roundtable discussions led by Grimmer and Leclerc, the consensus was that conventions offer a greater value proposition when impacts are viewed beyond just the tourism effects. The associations present acknowledged the value of planning and implementing legacy impacts while the ICCA members participants, as representatives of their destinations, agreed that being proactive about the positive give-back to their communities through meetings will mean higher quality events and higher impacts from the meetings they support. This means that when the destination suppliers co-create solutions with their association clients, it is a win-win where meetings are a powerful way to advance associations' legacy goals whilst always providing opportunities for achieving impacts for the host communities.

Case study EASL Impact Project 2022, London

Leclerc ended the programme with a case study featuring the European Association for the Study of the Liver – EASL. In 2022, EASL launched its first impact project to coincide with the International Liver Congress™ (ILC) hosted in London, UK. As a firm commitment to implementing the latest public health recommendations for liver health, EASL wanted to ensure that their congress events benefitted local communities as much as attending healthcare professionals. Its impact events were focused on providing early education on liver health, attracting key talent in the field, and supporting efforts to improve preventive screening of liver diseases, moving beyond the borders of the congress to create a lasting impact in the London community. More details [here](#).

Summary Key Points

- Every organisation should have a risk appetite statement. Determining its risk appetite will help the association make better choices by considering the level of risk (financial, resourcing, time) more effectively in decision making.
- Use the 'logic model' framework to guide legacy impact development. Putting more focus on association legacies can help to sustain associations as well as the environment and both associations and host destinations can leverage this to drive a world of transformation.
- Associations need to engage in vital collaborations with a broad range of local stakeholders and focus on desired impacts, while destinations gain powerful platforms that showcase expertise and success to the government and local communities.
- Through measurement and reporting of legacy impacts, both the association and destination will provide new high value returns to their stakeholders and funders.
- Ideally, meeting legacy goals should be collaboratively driven. A thoughtful mix of association goals and destination goals will result in positive impacts for both parties.
- A New Long-Term Vision in the Meetings Industry:
The Quintuple Helix leverages strategic collaborations to drive greater impacts from meetings and events being hosted in a city so that they:
 - contribute to the mission, purpose and growth strategies of the association
 - support actively the social and economic development policies through bridging sector-related gaps in the destination
 - deliver tangible value to a wide ecosystem of stakeholders around this shared vision
 - generate maximum positive impact for the association, its members and the destination's ecosystem

Acknowledgement

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