

# Beyond the Basics: Consider Meeting Planning Standards of the Future

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As meeting planners know, the idea of meeting planning standards can encompass a wide-range of topics. Fortunately, there are many good sources for information and best practices related to negotiating and contracting, project management, and logistics, each of which are important in achieving an effectively run meeting or event.

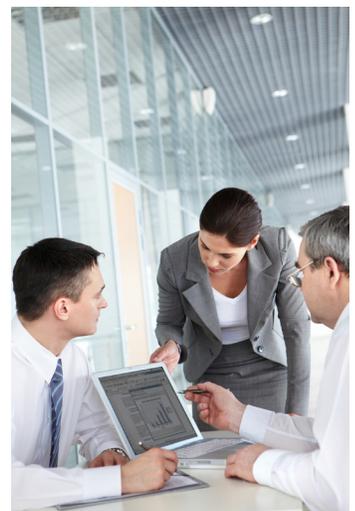
Added to this list should be understanding and applying consistent performance standards for your meetings, events and incentives. From the meeting planners' perspective, this is not only an opportunity to demonstrate the value of these programs to their organization, but of their contribution towards business success. At Maritz, we have a comprehensive view into how meeting professionals currently measure the outcomes of their meetings and events, and we believe planners should consider certain leading-edge practices in addition to these basic approaches.

## The "Basics" in Meeting Planning Standards

- Budget reporting- All clients we work with today have a reporting standard around budget. This area has received significantly more attention the last several years, reflecting the increased role of procurement professionals. Meeting planners should be sure they are not just reporting on how the money was spent, but on what they did to negotiate savings and favorable contract terms, as well as the steps taken to mitigate contract risk.
- Participant satisfaction- Meeting planners usually measure how satisfied participants were with their program via written surveys completed after the event. These surveys traditionally have focused on the "hospitality" aspects of the program. Additionally, many of these surveys ask questions about the business content and overall value created as a result of the event.
- Post-event review- These reviews typically combine the results from the prior two program surveys, with additional observations from the planning, onsite team, and other stakeholders about their perceptions of how the event operated. The focus of these reviews is on identifying what worked and what didn't, with an eye towards recommended changes for the next year's program.

## "Leading-Edge" Meeting Planning Standards

- Designing a meeting based upon participant-driven insights – The need to seek and incorporate the views, opinions and needs of your audience has never been greater. The economic downturn, the shifting generational make up of the population, a reawakened



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social conscience, and technological innovations have made it nearly impossible to build an effective program based on an “average participant” profile. Meeting planners with a more complete understanding of the uniqueness of their audience will lead to more effective meeting design. Effective design drives participant engagement and alignment to overall business objectives.

- **Measuring business outcomes both pre- and post-event** - We have seen an increase in companies’ desires to better understand and report on the business impact of the meetings, events and incentives they operate. These companies start by identifying the participant beliefs, attitudes or behaviors they wish to impact as a result of the meeting. Examples include:
  - What did participants learn from the event?
  - How did the event impact the participant’s belief or commitment to a certain business goal?
  - How did the event change a participant’s desire to do business with the company?

These business objectives are measured via surveys to participants prior to the event to establish a baseline, and then tested after the event to determine the impact the program had on achieving those business objectives.

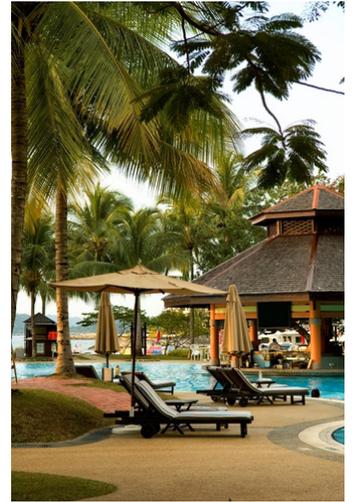
### A Vision for the Future

As a professional within the meeting and event industry, I also find myself asking if the industry should explore whether there is a larger perspective on measuring performance that we as meeting professionals should bring to our organizations.

The “Basic” and “Leading-Edge” standards focus on reporting results achieved within the timeframe of the event, and as such, usually rely on participants informing planners about their “intended” changes in behavior. For meeting planners and stakeholders to fully leverage the power of face-to-face events, and to better help organizations invest wisely in this area, should meeting professionals challenge themselves to **better measure and report behavioral changes**, well beyond the timeframes of the event?

In order to better identify and improve performance, we need to focus on how meeting, event and incentive travel strategies effectively support specific business objectives. Whether it’s through increased employee engagement, lower turnover, improving customer experience or increasing sales productivity, we need a better approach to gauge performance; otherwise, there’s no way to truly understand or steer towards continued performance improvement. Successfully tackling this issue not only advances the industry, but elevates meeting planners’ own standing and performance within their organization.

I’d appreciate hearing from planners their thoughts on this. Has measurement of business outcomes become a higher priority for you? Is this something on which the industry should increase its efforts?



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