

# Legacy: A Driving Advocacy for Association Events

Association events are linked to a very vital piece of the meetings industry’s puzzle, one that brings together creative minds, talents, wisdom, and thought leadership. These compelling words underscore the primary motivations behind the existence and purpose of association events, which will keep on thriving in any format, no matter what happens in this world.



*AUTHOR: SISSY LIGNOU - PRESIDENT & CEO, AFEA CONGRESS, AND PRESIDENT-ELECT OF IAPCO*

**T**he power of connecting people drives us, the professionals of this industry, to daily perform successful events for our clients and our organisations. There is no greater pleasure for a meeting planner than the delivery of a prosperous, record-breaking event, that leaves its mark on the organisation’s history and milestones.

There is no greater reward than the establishment of a lasting legacy for both the community and the destination through the activities and outcomes of events. And yes, legacy can have a very powerful role in showcasing the value of the global meetings industry, as it relates to the long-lasting impact of our sector.

But first, let’s have a look at the broader role of our business.

The voice of global as well as national associations active in the meetings industry is united in many aspects, but very much aligned on one fundamental fact: the power and huge impact of our sector in the global economy. This can be considered the primary driver of advocacy within our field.

On 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2024, in celebration of **Global Meetings Industry Day**, **IAPCO** unveiled its *annual 2023 IAPCO member survey*, highlighting the industry’s value and the activities of leading global PCOs. The survey revealed an increase in economic impact from pre-pandemic results of €12.8 billion in 2019 to €13.47 billion in 2022, as well as a significant growth in number of events and professionals employed in the members’ companies.

In addition, the **Events Industry Council** and **Oxford Economics** collaborated on an extended research

project on the economic significance of meetings, presenting a **1.6 trillion USD contribution from business events to GDP**, a number which could rank the sector as the 13<sup>th</sup> largest economy globally.

Meetings contribute to employment, seasonality and foster more than 40 professions related to the design, organisation, and delivery process of an event. They draw upscale and high-income attendees who typically spend five to seven times more than regular tourists in a given destination, and who could also act as ambassadors for the hosting country. Our business promotes destinations and their potential to host high-end meetings. It contributes to urban development and further improvement of facilities and infrastructure.

An influential industry deserving of preservation and advancement, it serves as a catalyst for forthcoming national strategies, global policies, and growth. It is a strength that should be utilised to the full by governments, local authorities, policy-makers, and key opinion leaders.

In the current period, various organisations representing our industry place advocacy at the top of their agenda, a fact showcasing their intention to spread the word about the positive impact of the sector within, but especially outside, our ‘meetings bubble’. Many voices, different approaches, and diverse advocacy strategies, but all aligned with one main vision.

This vision is also driving IAPCO, as advocacy is at the forefront of the association’s five-year strategic plan, with the goal of raising the profile and importance of IAPCO-accredited PCOs. In this sense, IAPCO launched

a global advocacy priority initiative, which was officially announced at the recent **Annual Meeting and General Assembly** in Ljubljana this year.

Now, association events can play a significant role in this process due to their characteristics, as they not only gather wisdom, knowledge and expertise in one place, not only they contribute to the development of science, medicine, and scientific excellence, but they also rotate among various destinations, which allows them to establish a strong legacy in various fields. Association events have the capability to highlight the cultural and historical heritage of destinations, foster innovation, promote sustainable development and enhance community development. They are delivered via collaboration and synergies among the professionals of the industry, the DMO, the local and state officials, the supplier chain, the volunteers, and the community. What could be better than showcasing the collaborative spirit of a destination, or for an international association to create a strong knowledge economy in the host country?

Legacy is a win-win long-term impact like no other, compared to other sectors, and it is a powerful argument for all meetings professionals to use when advocating on our business. It is a superpower that is very often unrecognised by policy-makers, but which should serve as a driving force in the advocacy for associations when they seek to gain recognition and support in the destinations that host their events.

Now is the time to unite our voices and agree on a global advocacy strategy for our meetings industry. If we succeed, magic can happen...

“ *The voice of global as well as national associations active in the meetings industry is (...) very much aligned on one fundamental fact: the power and huge impact of our sector in the global economy.* ”



*IAPCO is a global not-for-profit membership organisation whose mission is to raise the standards of service amongst its members and other sectors of the meetings and events industry by means of continuing education, interaction with other professionals and research. IAPCO today represents 138 accredited businesses of professional congress organisers in 40 countries. IAPCO membership is achieved through the demonstration of a continual high level of service delivery and is retained through annual quality checks and reviews by the IAPCO Quality Committee.*