

2026 Global Meetings & Events Forecast



Contents

- 03 Welcome
- 04 Top five takeaways
- 05 Global outlook
- 11 Making meaningful connections
- 18 Meet the modern meetings strategist
- 24 Technology elevates the attendee journey
- 28 ROI – or ROE?
- 31 Five action areas for 2026
- 32 Regional views
- 37 Acknowledgments

Welcome to the 15th edition of the Global Meetings and Events Forecast

After several years of upheaval, the 2026 Global Forecast finds the meetings sector settling into its new normal. We're seeing greater consistency when it comes to strategy and meeting management. For the second year running, meeting professionals share the same priority – delivering exceptional experiences. And in-person meetings are now firmly the norm, not the exception.

These signs of stability are welcome – and they're fueling growing optimism about the industry's prospects. Underpinning that positivity is the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) to transform our industry and supercharge our capabilities.

As the research shows, meeting professionals understand that AI can help us work smarter, unlock creativity, and drive engagement to new heights. And they aren't waiting for this to happen; many plan to deploy AI right across the meetings journey in the year ahead. I'm inspired by their determination to shape the future.

The Global Forecast is about starting a conversation about the future of our industry, so please get in touch with your views.

Thank you to everyone who contributed their expertise and insight. We couldn't do it without your partnership.

Saludos,

Gerardo Tejado Donde
Senior Vice President
Professional Services
Amex GBT




Five top takeaways


Now in its 15th year, the Amex GBT Global Meetings and Events Forecast sets the agenda for the global meetings and events industry, defining the themes that'll shape our industry over the next twelve months.

1

Optimism at a five-year high – but rising costs cause concern

 **85%**

meeting professionals “optimistic” for the sector in 2026.

 **38%**

say cost will be #1 challenge.

2

AI is going to be everywhere

50% embrace AI throughout the meetings journey.


34% will use AI to generate creative concepts.

40% will deliver AI-powered event apps.

28% will use AI to track attendee experience.

3

Top priority – creating engaging experiences



Meeting professionals' #1 priority – for the second year in a row:

Improving attendee experience with more memorable events.

4

Audiences want active involvement

Compared to five years ago, attendees want meetings to give them more:

42% said interactivity, for example, workshops.


40% said opportunities to socialize with other attendees.


40% said visible sustainability measures.

5

Smarter meetings measurement is on the way

Meeting professionals plan to adopt AI and digital tools to capture the value of meetings.

 **28%** use AI for post-event evaluation.

 **36%** use data and ROI measurement tools.

Methodology

The 2026 Global Meetings and Events Forecast is based on a survey of 601 meeting professionals in eight countries carried out by YouGov. The fieldwork took place between July 14 – 21, 2025. The Global Forecast industry panel – made up of Amex GBT M&E customers, partners, and specialists – provides insights and commentary throughout the report.

Global outlook

Optimism is at a five-year high as global meetings stabilize.

Meeting professionals feel good about the health of the meetings and events sector. 85% are “optimistic” about the year ahead, exceeding anything we’ve seen since 2021.¹

What explains the upbeat industry mood? Part of the explanation: The meetings sector is stabilizing after half a decade of unpredictability and change. Throughout the Global Forecast, we see signs of continuity as meeting professionals maintain focus on the same strategic priorities and practices, year-on-year.

Technology is another important factor in the optimism. As we show, meeting professionals are deploying digital solutions – including AI-enabled tools – right across their programs. This could help them unlock savings that they can redirect into improving attendee experience.

Meeting professionals expect budgets to increase in 2026 – but they may not increase enough to keep pace with rising prices. Technology could help them close the gap.

“Talking with customers, you get this sense of growing confidence and that’s feeding through to increased optimism and activity.”

Jennifer Nelson
Vice President, Strategic Meetings,
Amex GBT Meetings & Events

¹ Global Meetings and Events Forecasts, Amex GBT, 2022 - 2024.

Great expectations for 2026

28%
very optimistic

57%
optimistic

11%
less optimistic

3%
neither pessimistic
nor optimistic

Overall, how optimistic or pessimistic are you in relation to the health of the meetings and events sector in 2026?

Meetings budgets expected to rise

5%
significantly increasing

36%
increasing

47%
slightly increasing

6%
staying the same

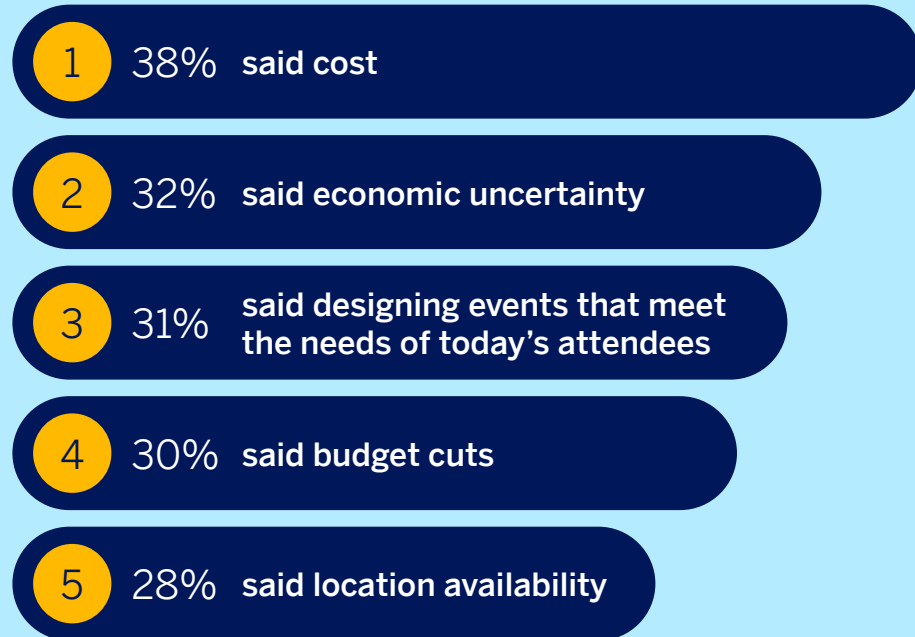
5%
decreasing

Please indicate whether overall spend for meetings and events within your organization is increasing or decreasing for 2026.

Rising costs are #1 challenge

Optimism is a headline for 2026 – but the bright outlook could be clouded by concerns about rising costs, followed by concerns about the broader economic climate. Budget cuts are also seen as challenge.

What could make meeting planning more of a challenge in 2026?



Which of the following areas, if any, do you see as challenges for meeting planning in 2026?



It's no surprise that cost tops the list of challenges for 2026. Seven in ten (71%) M&E professionals anticipate cost increases in the year ahead. While Amex GBT's Hotel Monitor forecasts moderate hotel rate rises for 2026, wage inflation and food and beverage price rises will push up costs.²

Costs per attendee on the up

6%

significantly increasing (+11% or more)

27%

increasing

38%

slightly increasing

21%

staying the same

6%

slightly decreasing

2%

decreasing

1%

significantly decreasing

Top 5 meeting types expected to see cost increases

1 Conference without trade show / exhibit

2 Incentive / special event

3 Product launch

4 Healthcare professional (HCP) meetings

5 Internal team meeting / training

Please indicate how the total cost per attendee for all meeting types is changing for 2026. Based on total meeting budget divided by total planned attendees excluding air costs.



Innovation to manage cost

While time-tested tactics – like downgrading venue or shifting to virtual formats – can help manage rising costs, meeting professionals are exploring more innovative approaches. More than a third (35%) seek to boost their budgets by winning supplementary funding (e.g., from sponsorship). One member of our industry panel describes how organizations have started charging for exclusive C-suite access, offering attendees an opportunity to sit down with senior leaders. Another interview panel member shared how hosting events in secondary cities or on Mondays or Fridays – often less preferred days – has become a common cost-saving approach.

Top 10 tactics for managing uncertainty



In which of the following ways, if any, has current economic uncertainty (e.g. inflation, changes to travel, and meetings budget) impacted the meetings and events that you plan or manage?

“Encouraging bookings with preferred suppliers is central to our savings strategy, helping to consolidate spend and strengthen negotiations.”

Nandor Fejes
Lead Category Manager, Fleet & Travel
Grundfos

Meeting types in 2026

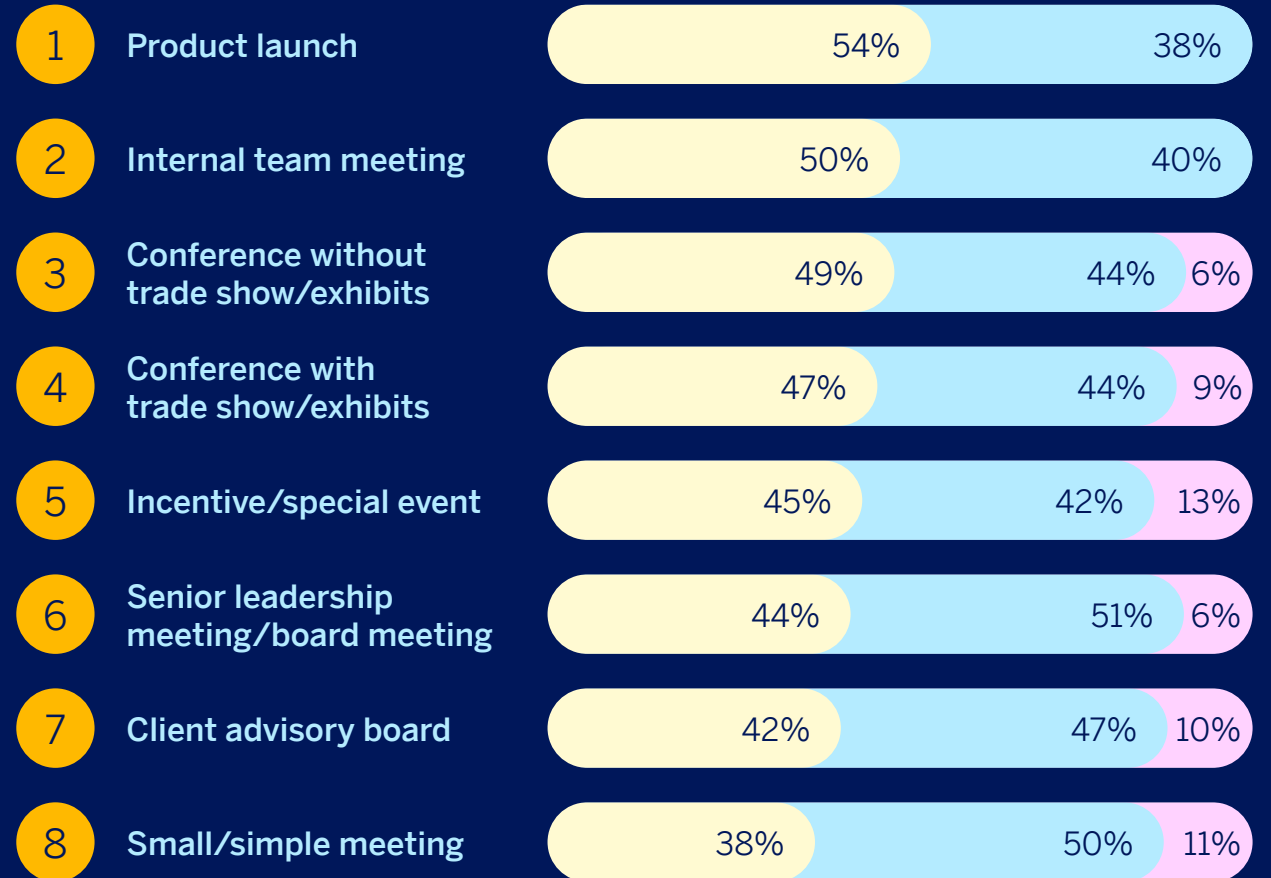
Across all meeting types, volume should be stable or increase. The uptick in product launches suggests that companies are bringing new products to market and see events as a vital channel. Internal team meetings remain essential, continuing a recent trend to reunite hybrid employees, improve collaboration, and strengthen company culture.

Face-to-face formats continue to recover – more than half of meeting professionals expect the majority of their meetings to be in-person.




Growth meeting types

● Increase ● Stay same ● Less



Please indicate how the number of each of the following types of meetings you are expecting to hold in 2026 (in-person, virtual, and hybrid formats) are changing from last year.



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Making meaningful connections

In a screen-dominated world, people crave engaging, in-person experiences.

Meeting professionals understand that it's vital to deliver unforgettable events that leave a lasting impression, especially in an economy that is now geared towards selling experiences. With so many events competing with each other in the calendar, creating an engaging – and, ideally, personalized – experience is essential to stand out and draw in attendees. One-third of who? put “improving the attendee experience with more memorable events” as their top priority for 2026.

Meeting planners are constantly looking for the next big idea, using AI or adapting concepts from other events to impress attendees. Creating emotionally resonant experiences involves a combination of neuroscience, psychology, and event design, as an Amex GBT study, [The Art & Science Behind Unforgettable Events](#), explores.



With more generations in today's audiences, creating engaging experiences is increasingly challenging

For the first time, five generations are working side by side - the widest age spread we've ever seen. "That creates both challenges and opportunities for event organizers," says Rebecca DeLuca, vice president of destination sales at the Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority (LVCVA). "Many successful events now design micro-communities - tailored spaces and experiences shaped by audience, budget, and goals - to make sure every generation feels included and engaged."

“Attendees want to walk away feeling like they’ve done something that wasn’t just for work – that they’ve come away with the story of being here. ‘I’ve tried this’. We did this. We felt like this. I want to go back.”

Emma Bason
Director of Global Venue Sourcing
Amex GBT Meetings & Events

Meeting professionals are seeing growing demand for face-to-face engagement as audiences span more generations, including Gen Z (aged 20 to 30). This has caused a move away from the sprint-style and marathon-style sessions that were once so popular. Sessions are shorter, allowing for longer networking breaks. Increasingly, attendees want events where they can be active participants and create human connections.

Audience expectations have shifted over the last five years. Attendees today want:

- 1 42% more interactive sessions, e.g., workshops
- 2 40% more social activities, networking opportunities
- 3 40% meetings to include visible sustainability
- 4 37% more personalized experiences
- 5 34% meetings and events closer to where they based

In your opinion, how have attendee expectations of meetings and events changed over the last five years?

Location counts when it comes to delivering dream experiences.

With social media making it easier than ever to uncover the latest hotspots, meeting professionals know they need to do more to captivate audiences who've seen it all. A venue might be a hotel – but it could be a museum, a local landmark, or a sports stadium. The destination and venue can set the tone, shaping the mood and energy of the entire experience.

What gets a destination or venue onto the shortlist? Logistical factors – such as cost, ease of travel, and technology capabilities – remain key. Safety is also important: a quarter of Global Forecast survey respondents cited 'safety concerns related to economic/political instability' when it comes to choosing a meeting destination.

Key factors for destination and venue selection

Destination

- 1 38% cost
- 2 37% ease of travel and transportation to location for attendees
- 3 34% destination is safe and secure for all attendees
- 4 25% safety concerns related to economic/political instability
- 5 23% sustainability impact assessment

Venue

- 1 30% cost
- 2 26% ease of travel and transportation to location for attendees
- 3 22% ability to host hybrid meetings
- 4 20% destination is safe and secure for all attendees
- 5 18% specific location type needed - e.g. airport or near customer site

“A great venue today must be a dynamic environment, capable of creating experiences with people at its heart. It has to be capable of storytelling through design. It has to promote a sense of belonging, facilitating genuine human connection.”

Julien Houdebine
Global Chief Sales & Revenue Officer,
Accor

What are the top factors influencing meeting venue / destination selection in 2026?

Balancing budget with great experiences

Meeting professionals want to meet and exceed growing attendee expectations – but they also identify cost constraints as the top challenge to delivering expectations.

From flights and accommodations to catering and logistics, location impacts nearly every line item in the event budget. It's why many planners are shifting towards secondary cities and venues outside city centers – but this isn't always a straightforward swap.

“Meetings and events tend to be more emotional than travel. You can provide all the data indicating an event held outside of Paris is more economical, but people will not do it. There's an emotional desire to be in Paris.”

Marcella Wiegand

Director of Client Management
Amex GBT Meetings & Events

Capturing creativity – does AI hold the answer?

Creativity is key for ideating, designing, and delivering experiences that resonate with attendees on a personal and emotional level. But harnessing great ideas is not always easy.

The creativity challenge

24%

of meeting professionals agree that “developing creative concepts” will be a challenge for 2026.

Which of the following areas, if any, do you see as challenges for meeting planning in 2026? Which of the following, if any, are your main challenges in delivering the best possible attendee experience at your meetings?

18%

believe difficulty getting creative and brainstorming support make it harder to deliver the best possible experience.

“Creative ideation is critical in the entire event process including planning, pre-event, on-site, and post event. Creativity drives differentiation and makes sure attendees remember and enjoy your experience more than others. With scrutiny on ROI, no one can afford to run an event that isn’t truly memorable and makes an impact.”

Rich Atkinson-Toal

Global Vice President of Brand & Experience Studio
Amex GBT Meetings & Events

Technology offers an answer, helping organizations generate ideas, create engaging content, and monitor the impact of the experience on attendees. A significant proportion of meeting professionals are planning to deploy AI to help them achieve these goals.

How AI can help meeting professionals drive creativity in 2026

34%

generating creative concepts / themes

31%

content creation

28%

tracking attendee engagement

For 2026, how, if at all, do you plan to use artificial intelligence (AI) specifically for your meetings / events?

Sustainability – the new norm

Sustainability is no longer optional. Attendees, especially younger generations, expect events to reflect this as a baseline. Almost one in four meeting professionals say attendees demand visible sustainability actions like reducing plastics and using sustainably-sourced food and drinks. The expectation is that events leave a positive legacy – environmental, social, and cultural. For many organizations (38%), this is now embedded in their meetings policies.

Asked about their top priorities for the year ahead, however, 28% of meeting professionals admitted that improving sustainability initiatives and measurement is still a pending item – behind reducing costs and boosting attendee engagement.

Measurement, however, remains a gap. Only a quarter (25%) of respondents currently track CO2e emissions; just 28% say they will prioritize improvements to sustainability metrics in 2026. Data is critical to quantify progress, justify spend, and demonstrate ROI – helping to make the business case for sustainable meetings.

“Sustainability is a business and social imperative, but it is also personal. It’s emotive, drives loyalty, and inspires. Post-event surveys consistently show that well-executed sustainability ranks among the top drivers of attendee engagement.”

Eloísa Urrutia
Head of Sustainability, Amex GBT Meetings & Events

Turning good intentions into action – how meeting professionals are implementing environmental sustainability.

- 1 38% said sustainable meetings and event policy
- 2 34% Minimizing disposables and prioritizing sustainable materials and production
- 3 33% Offering sustainable food & beverages (local, seasonal, and plant-based)
- 4 31% Prioritizing sustainable venues
- 5 30% Waste avoidance practices (e.g. food donation)

Has your organization implemented any of the following sustainability practices?

Inclusion to broaden engagement

In today's more open and interconnected world, inclusion is core to every successful meeting. Meeting professionals are embedding not only accessibility, but also inclusion and cultural representation across design, content, communication, sourcing, and even destination and food and beverage choices. This broadens relevance and ensures events connect authentically with today's audiences all attendees.

Social impact activities are gaining popularity too, as attendees look to give back to the event's local community, whether through initiatives like shared cooking with seniors, cultural exchanges with local groups, or volunteering, as some industry panel members suggested. At the same time, wellness and well-being are being integrated with more purpose, offering mindful breaks and restorative experiences that help attendees feel energized, present, and engaged.

Together, these elements transform events into experiences that are both purposeful and personally engaging.

Meeting professionals are taking steps to make meetings more inclusive for everyone

35%

said the organization has implemented accessibility measures, including accessible transportation, wheelchair-friendly venues, captioning and sign-language, and low-sensory rooms.

33%

have used inclusive content and communications, such as gender pronoun preferences and diverse imagery in meeting registration sites.

28%

have introduced measures to enhance the on-site experience, including inclusive name badges, gender-neutral bathrooms, and diverse dietary options.

Has your organization implemented any of the following modern meeting experience practices?

“When an event is designed so everyone can participate with comfort and confidence, it unlocks greater engagement and stronger connections. The more people feel they truly belong in the experience, the more powerful the outcome becomes.”

Eloísa Urrutia
Head of Sustainability
Amex GBT Meetings & Events

Meet the modern meetings strategist

Today's meeting professionals need to be strategists, balancing a range of meeting program priorities.

Meeting professionals' priorities for 2026 reveal the complexity of their roles. As noted, attendee experience is in pole position – but meetings professionals are also thinking about how they can do more with data and control costs.

The focus for 2026 – top five priorities

- 1 33% said improve attendee experience with more memorable events
- 2 31% said improve processes for collection of data at the event, e.g., attendance levels, attendee satisfaction
- 3 30% said reduce costs
- 4 28% said improve / incorporate sustainability initiatives and metrics
- 5 27% said incorporate the latest technology

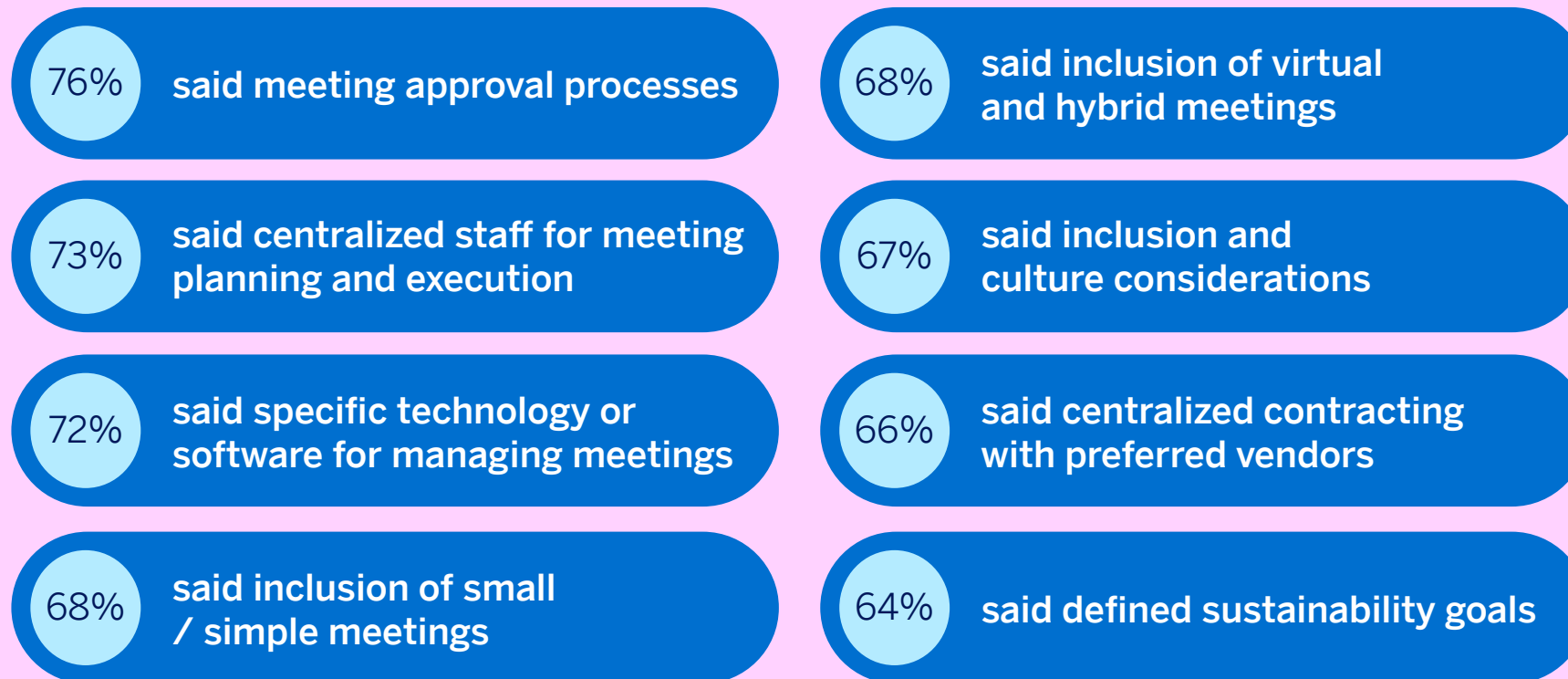
Thinking about your program of events and meetings, what are your priorities for the year ahead?



Policy sits at the heart of a strategic approach

Most meeting professionals today adopt industry best practices to drive priorities like managing cost, improving efficiency, or standardizing processes. Looking back to the 2025 Global Forecast, adoption has increased across many best practice areas. More than three quarters of meeting professionals say they use meeting approval processes in the 2026 survey; in 2025 the equivalent figure was 47%.³

Meeting professionals embrace industry best practices*

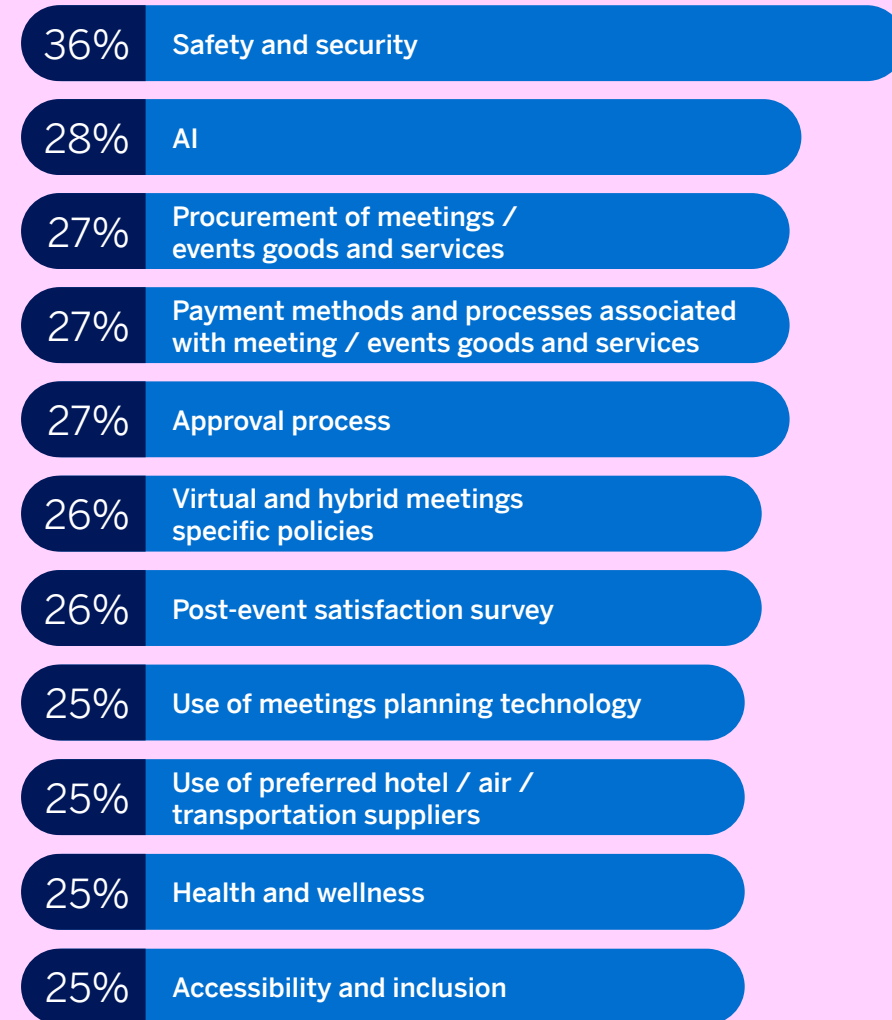


To what extent, if at all, do you use the following practices in your meetings program?

*For all or most meetings

Organizations are adopting industry best practices – but this can only get them so far. To be truly strategic, these approaches need to be embedded in the meetings policy. Policy enables the meeting professional to communicate their priorities to all stakeholders, internal and external, and to define goals, processes, and behaviors. The Global Forecast survey reveals significant gaps between the use of best practices and adoption of policy. The implication is clear; many meeting professionals are still not taking advantage of policy as a critical lever.

Strategic priorities not reflected in meetings policy



Which of the following components are explicitly included in your organization's meetings and events (M&E) policy?



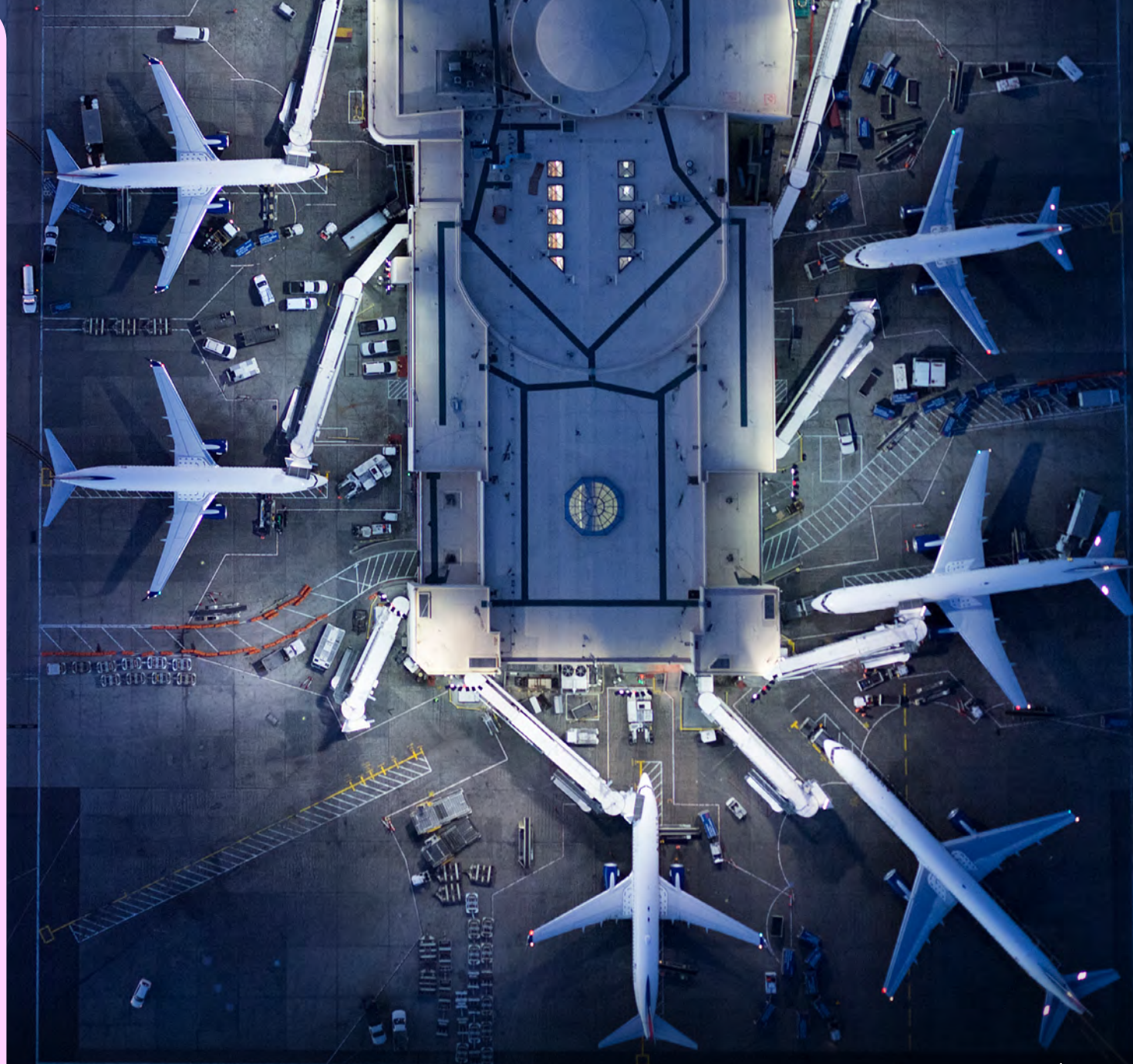
Streamlining relationships with travel management and air partners

Centralizing travel arrangements through group air management – arranging flights for 10 or more people to the same event – can simplify logistics and deliver a more seamless attendee experience. Meeting professionals say 43% of 2026 meetings, on average, will include group air management.

“We’re seeing strong growth in demand for incentives, meetings, and events. Planners really value the flexibility that group air booking offers, and we pride ourselves on being a one-stop-shop for group travel needs. With competition rising for limited inventory, we encourage meeting professionals to book early for their 2026 events.”

Shannon Szoke
Director, Specialty Sales
Delta Air Lines

In a similar vein, meeting professionals can simplify planning by partnering with a single provider for travel, meetings, and events. One in two meeting specialists report they use the same provider for both managed travel and meetings and events.



Managing meeting risks

Geopolitical events continue to lead the headlines, generating uncertainty and concern about the risk environment for meetings and events. Meeting professionals are clear, however, about the actions they can take to manage and mitigate risk.

Duty of care is a crucial filter when selecting event cities – 34% of respondents prioritize safety, and 25% want economic and political stability.

As Jennifer Nelson, Vice President, Strategic Meetings, Amex GBT Meetings & Events, explains:

“Planners are putting more emphasis on on-site safety, evaluating venues’ emergency plans and coordinating contingency measures.”

Spotlight on healthcare professional meetings

Pharmaceutical and healthcare professionals are more optimistic about 2026 than other industries. Almost 73% are “very optimistic” about the year ahead, versus 62% on average across all sectors. 60% say the number of healthcare professional (HCP) meetings they’ll hold in 2026 will increase, while 28% say the number of HCP meetings will stay the same. This likely reflects the industry’s focus on product development over the past 18 months, with product pipelines now coming to fruition.

Meal caps remain an issue; 31% of pharma and healthcare specialists see HCP meal caps as a challenge for 2026. This chimes with findings in last year’s Forecast, when 15% of respondents said HCP meal caps have a negative impact and make it difficult to deliver a positive attendee experience.⁴





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Technology elevates the attendee journey

Meeting professionals have embraced digital solutions to power productivity gains and efficiency.

These efficiency gains help free up time so meeting professionals can focus on what they love to do – creating amazing attendee experiences. Streamlining processes via technology can also create space in budgets, meaning funds can be redeployed to engage specialist support for creativity. And, of course, AI can be a tool for creativity, particularly at the ideation stage.

When asked about the greatest benefit of deploying technology, meeting professionals said they valued most how it enabled them to deliver improved experiences.

Tech's top benefits – enabling improved experiences

- 1 Delivering a more streamlined attendee experience
- 2 Creating a more memorable attendee experience
- 3 Enhancing productivity
- 4 Increasing creativity in event production
- 5 Reducing costs

Where do you see the greatest value and / or benefit of using technology in your event program?

“The range of technologies now available to meeting professionals is exciting – and overwhelming. The supplier landscape is fragmented, and it can be difficult to make sourcing decisions with confidence. At Amex GBT, we have rigorous processes for onboarding third-party supplier partners available in our marketplace. They’ve been piloted, tested, approved, and onboarded in our data privacy and security process before we recommend them to a client and use them on a client’s behalf.”

Ariana Reed

Director, Global Customer Experience
Amex GBT Meetings & Events

Creating interactive experiences on-site

Technology is transforming meeting experiences. Advanced audiovisual solutions, like LED video walls and projection mapping, create dynamic lighting and striking effects for in-person attendees – and broadcast-quality visuals for people joining online.

35% said sophisticated AV technology (e.g., LED video walls, AI camera tracking, etc.)

31% said live polling and feedback tools

29% said onsite check-in tools

26% said QR codes

23% said digital gifting and sampling

20% said virtual reality

19% said wearable technology

15% said digital photo booths

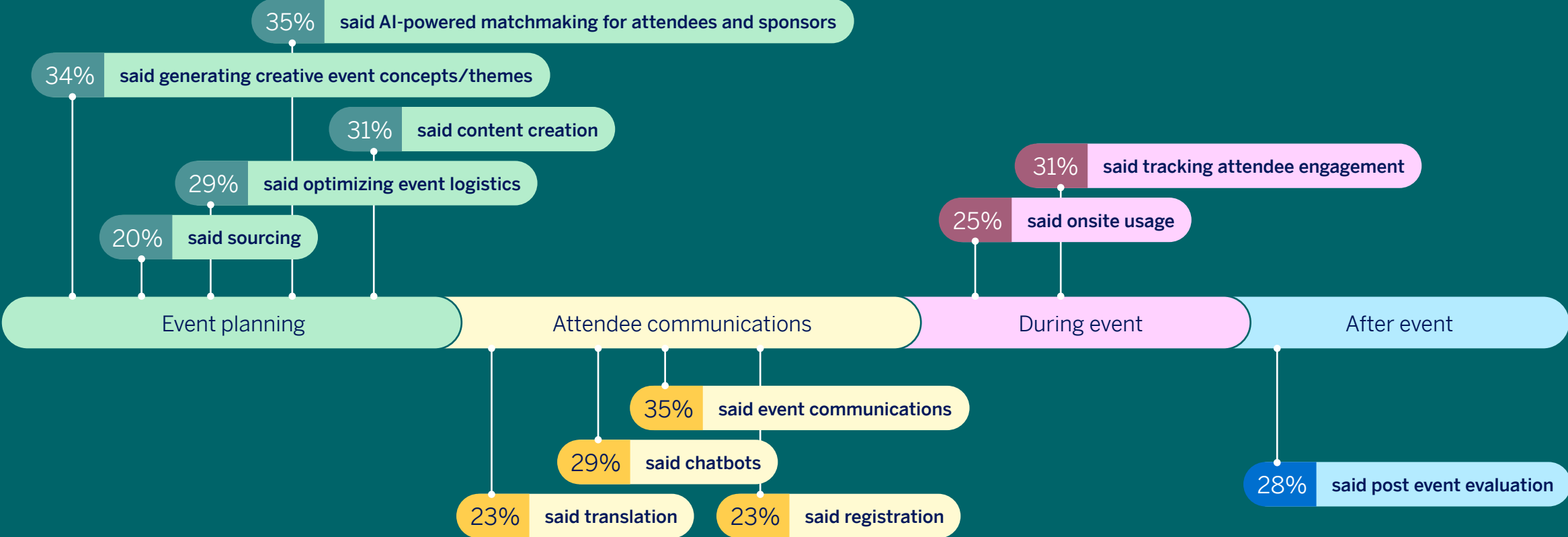
15% said holographic content delivery

What technologies do you expect to use in your 2026 meetings and events?



Meeting specialists have been quick to understand how AI can enhance their work, right across the meetings journey. Half (50%) plan to use generative AI (GenAI) for tasks such as agenda building, communications, or virtual assistants/chatbots for attendees and planners in 2026. Four in ten (40%) will use AI-powered event apps with personalized agendas and smart networking suggestions.

AI at work right through the meeting journey



For 2026, how, if at all, do you plan to use artificial intelligence (AI) specifically for your meetings / events?

Talking with our industry panel, it's clear many meeting professionals view AI as an ally, freeing them to concentrate on strategy and creativity. For instance, meeting planners can focus on creating an event that engages their audience and advances organizational goals, then use AI to explore venue ideas and identify the perfect spot that fits their budget, capacity, location requirements. M&E professionals' skills and expertise remain critical, however, to prompting AI, refining and applying its outputs, as Rebecca DeLuca, LVCVA, explains: "AI is a tool to enhance, not replace, our industry. It won't replace the vital role of meeting professionals, but it will streamline functions, giving us more time to focus on creativity, strategy, and human connection."

"AI will soon power much of what happens behind the curtain, acting as a critical assistant that helps event organizers reduce planning friction and enable more personalized face-to-face moments at scale. But even as technology advances, events will continue to be decidedly human. In fact, in an AI and tech-driven world, authentic connections will likely stand out even more."

McNeel Keenan

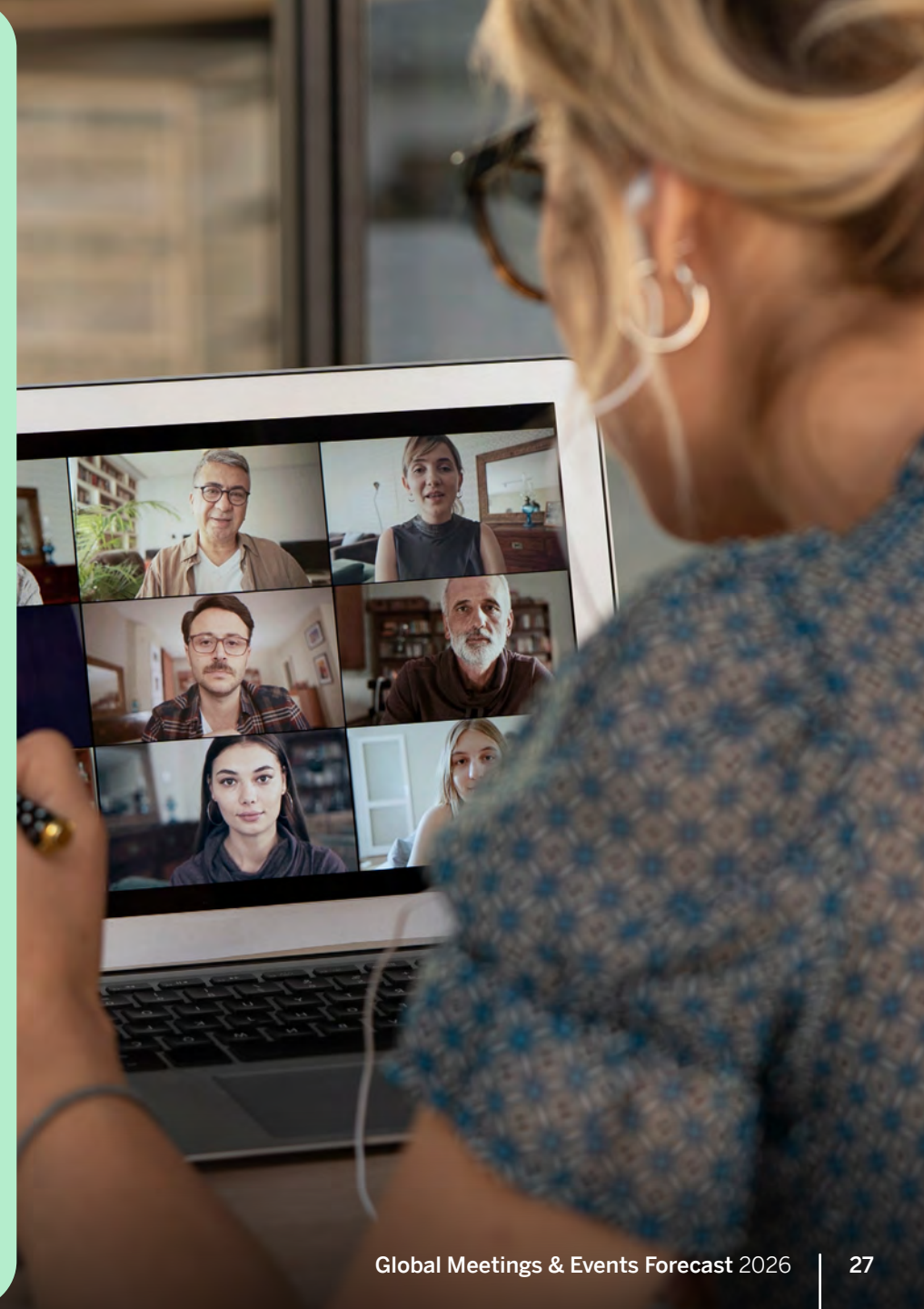
Vice President, Product Development
Cvent

Digital solutions define event planning and delivery. Are meetings professionals ready to manage the risks?

A key consideration in using meeting tech tools is data privacy and security risks. AI-driven personalization, for example, often relies on collecting and analyzing participant data, which can be perceived as a form of profiling. To comply with ever-evolving privacy regulations, organizations must adopt appropriate safeguards.

In response, meeting professionals are starting to implement AI-related guidelines in their meeting policies, with 28% of respondents to the Global Forecast survey noting their companies have done so.

As companies onboard more meeting technology providers, they need to thoroughly review each third party's data privacy and security policies to make sure information is managed responsibly.



ROI or ROE?

Meeting professionals have long wanted to be able to measure return on investment (ROI) in meetings. Maybe we need to look at return on experience instead.

Capturing the value of meetings in numbers is not straightforward. How do you quantify the impact of being able to network, connect face-to-face, and share ideas in person?

“The value of an event is much easier to quantify when it’s a trade show. You can measure the number of people who stop by the booth and who you have conversations with,” explains Marcella Wiegand, Director of client management at Amex GBT Meetings & Events. “But when it comes to internal meetings, it’s hard to quantify the value. And yet, I hear it on a very regular basis: people get upset when those internal meetings are cut.”

Organizations are nonetheless seeking numbers to demonstrate the value of their investments, helped by the increasing quantity of data available.

Measuring meetings

24%

of meeting professionals include ROI metrics in meetings policy

26%

have guidelines for post-event satisfaction surveys in the policy

36%

plan to use data and ROI measurement tools in 2026

Which of the following components are explicitly included in your organization’s meetings and events (M&E) policy?

For 2026, how, if at all, do you plan to use artificial intelligence (AI) specifically for your meetings / events?

“It’s hard to consistently track ROI for events. But now that we have so many data points, it’s easier to say, ‘This is why we spent \$1 million.’”

Ariana Reed

Director, Global Customer Experience
Amex GBT Meetings & Events



But there's another way to think about measuring the success of meetings. Given so much of the value of meetings and events lies in their emotional impact, understanding the 'Return on Experience' (ROE) of an event could be a more meaningful metric.

“Return on experience pinpoints how an event delivered against its strategic and creative objectives. Did attendees walk away feeling engaged and inspired? Did they learn something new? Did their opinions about the organization or company change? Where did the creativity deliver, and where did it fall short? These are the insights that will unlock more impactful meetings – and more efficient event spend – in the future.”

Rich Atkinson-Toal

Global Vice President of Brand & Experience Studio
Amex GBT Meetings & Events

AI is essential for ROE, enabling event monitoring via badge scans and session check-ins, transforming behavioral data into actionable insights. 28% of meeting professionals plan to use AI for post-event evaluation in 2026, with that proportion likely to increase in the future. In a world where event organizers must compete to get attendees to commit their time and attention, understanding ROE will better equip meeting professionals to attract attendees to future events.

“Companies are now evaluating events across three key metrics: return on investment, carbon impact, and return on experience. Return on experience is a qualitative metric that seeks to answer the question – did the event deliver on the emotional needs of attendees?”

Julien Houdebine

Global Chief Sales & Revenue Officer
Accor

Take the first steps to measuring ROE

1

Set your ROE goals

At the start of the event planning process, identify the emotional needs and expectations of your attendees. What do they hope to experience at your event? What feelings and responses do you aim to achieve? This will help you define the qualitative goal for your ROE assessment.

2

Use technology to understand impact

Monitoring attendee sentiment and gathering feedback, both during and post-event, is simpler and faster than ever, thanks to new technologies including AI. Use digital tools to gather the data and insights that will support your ROE assessment. This can help you identify the extent to which attendees had the emotional response you defined at the event planning stage.

3

Review, report, refine

Use the data you've gathered to measure success against your original ROE goal, sharing this with stakeholders alongside qualitative metrics, such as financial insights and carbon measurement. Identify where the event delivered on its experiential goals, and where there were gaps, or aspects that didn't prompt the desired response. Use these insights to refine your approach for the next event.

Five action areas for 2026

Key considerations to help meeting professionals succeed in the year ahead.

1

Be a voice for meetings in your organization

Budgets are set to rise, but costs are rising too. Consider how you can become an effective advocate within your organization to secure the investment you need to deliver great experiences.

2

Take advantage of today's tech to measure and improve

Technology offers new ways to capture the value of meetings. Think about how you can harness these data insights to enhance engagement, improve program efficiency, and help drive high quality conversations with your colleagues and leaders.

3

Find opportunities to get creative

Fresh, original ideas that inspire audiences - is the essential ingredient for engaging events. Our industry panel emphasizes the importance of incorporating creativity at every stage of the event lifecycle. How can you nurture creativity throughout your event program?

4

Make space for attendees in your agenda

Event goers are looking for more ways to interact with your event and socialize with other attendees. A great event doesn't mean an intensely packed agenda. Think about how you can create opportunities for people to get together to solve problems, get to know each other, or just hang out.

5

Use sustainability to increase your event's appeal

We're all familiar with sustainability checklists but think about how you can go beyond compliance to use sustainability as a creative and brand advantage. Use the latest, technology-driven measurement tools to prove that doing good is also good business.

Regional views

Optimistic about the health of the sector in 2026

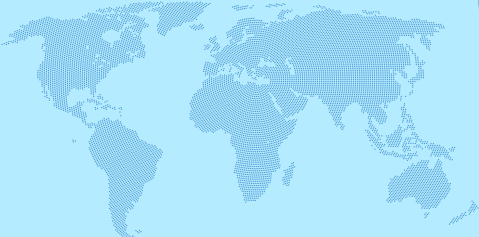
Overall spend on M&E increasing for 2026

More than half of meetings will be in-person only

Top ranking priority for the year ahead

Top planned use of AI in 2026

Top meetings destinations for 2026



North America

93%

95%

45%

Incorporating the latest technology advancements

AI-powered matchmaking for attendees and sponsors

1. Las Vegas
2. Chicago
3. New York
4. Orlando
5. Dallas

Latin America

79%

85%

43%

Improving the attendee experience with more memorable events

AI-powered matchmaking for attendees and sponsors

1. Mexico City
2. Bogota
3. Buenos Aires
4. Sao Paulo
5. Cancun

Europe

91%

90%

46%

Reducing costs

Event communications

1. London
2. Madrid
3. Barcelona
4. Amsterdam
5. Paris

Asia-Pacific

74%

82%

52%

Improving the attendee experience with more memorable events

Event communications

1. Singapore
2. Bangkok
3. Sydney
4. Tokyo
5. Bali

Regional insights

Local perspectives on the trends for 2026, provided by Amex GBT Meetings & Events team members around the world.

North America

Outlook

Meeting professionals in North America lead the world when it comes to optimism – but they're also cleareyed about the challenges they face in the year ahead. They understand they're competing to win attendees' precious time and attention. And they're all too aware that fast rising costs could erode their ability to deliver the experiences that today's audiences expect.

Top priorities

Technology is the big story; customers are asking how they can use AI to become more productive, reduce costs, and how they can incorporate AI into the attendee experience in a meaningful way. Customers are also looking at flexible contract terms to mitigate risks and plan for the unexpected.



What to watch out for

2026 will be a big year for events in North America which meeting professionals will need to work around and plan for. This includes the FIFA World Cup across the US, Mexico, and Canada, the celebrations for the US's 250th birthday and Taylor Swift's wedding.

Latin America

Outlook

Customers are upbeat about connecting in-person and investing in experiences. Cost is the #1 issue, particularly in countries like Argentina where inflation is constant challenge, with fluctuating costs from initial sourcing to contracting. Planners are caught between rising costs and rising attendee experiences; how can they deliver an exceptional experience without breaking the piggy bank?

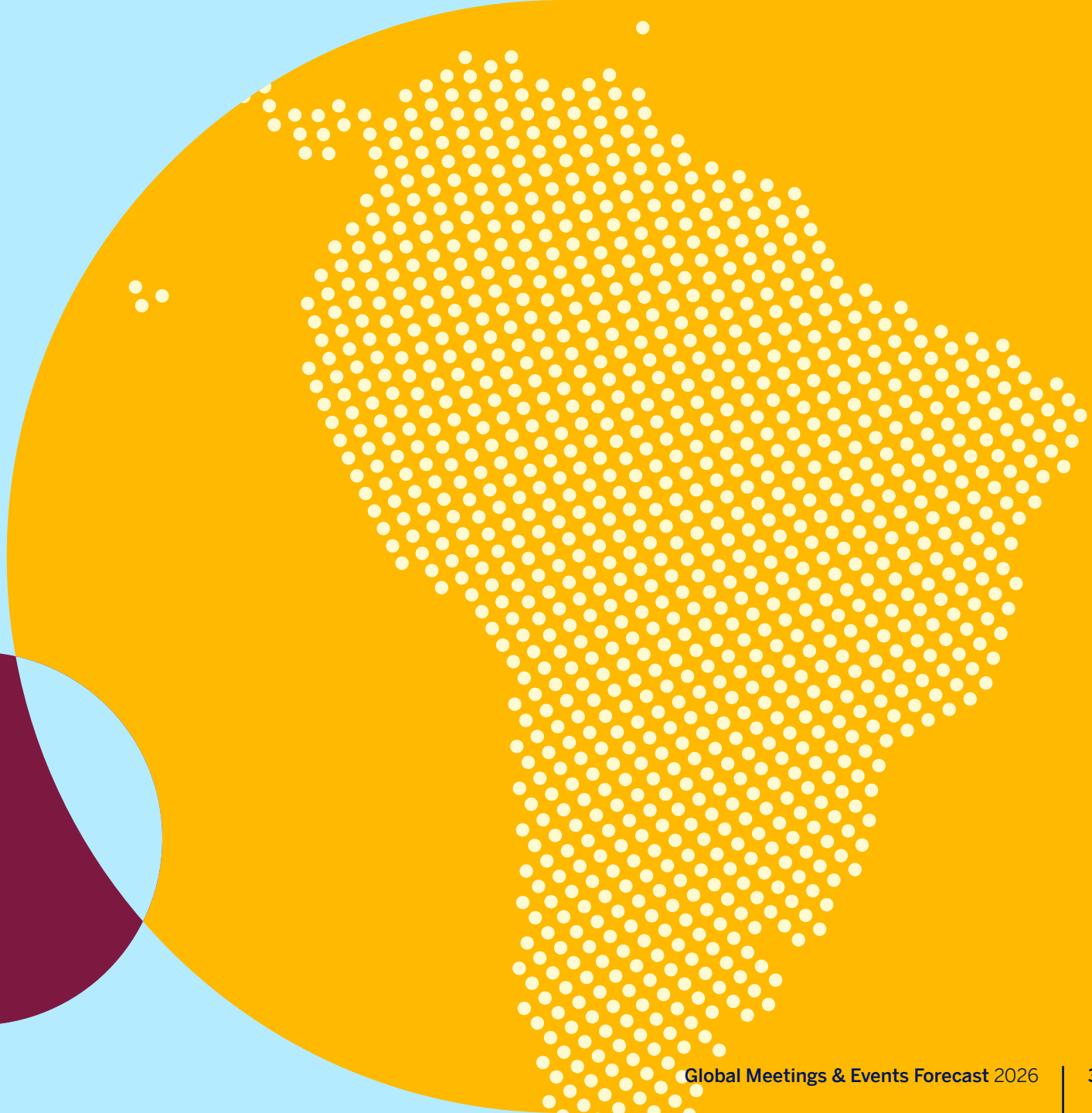
Top priorities

Attendee experience is a key focus for customers in Latin America, just as we see elsewhere. Customers are also looking at flexible contract terms, including more generous cancellations – it's an unpredictable world, after all.



What to watch out for

There's a lot of excitement about how AI could save time and cost which can be recycled into attendee experience. But education will be key – historically, we've seen some cautiousness in Latin America when it comes to adopting a new technology.



Europe

Outlook

Meeting professionals in Europe share in the global optimism about the sector's prospects in 2026. And – as seen globally – there are concerns about costs and macroeconomic uncertainty.

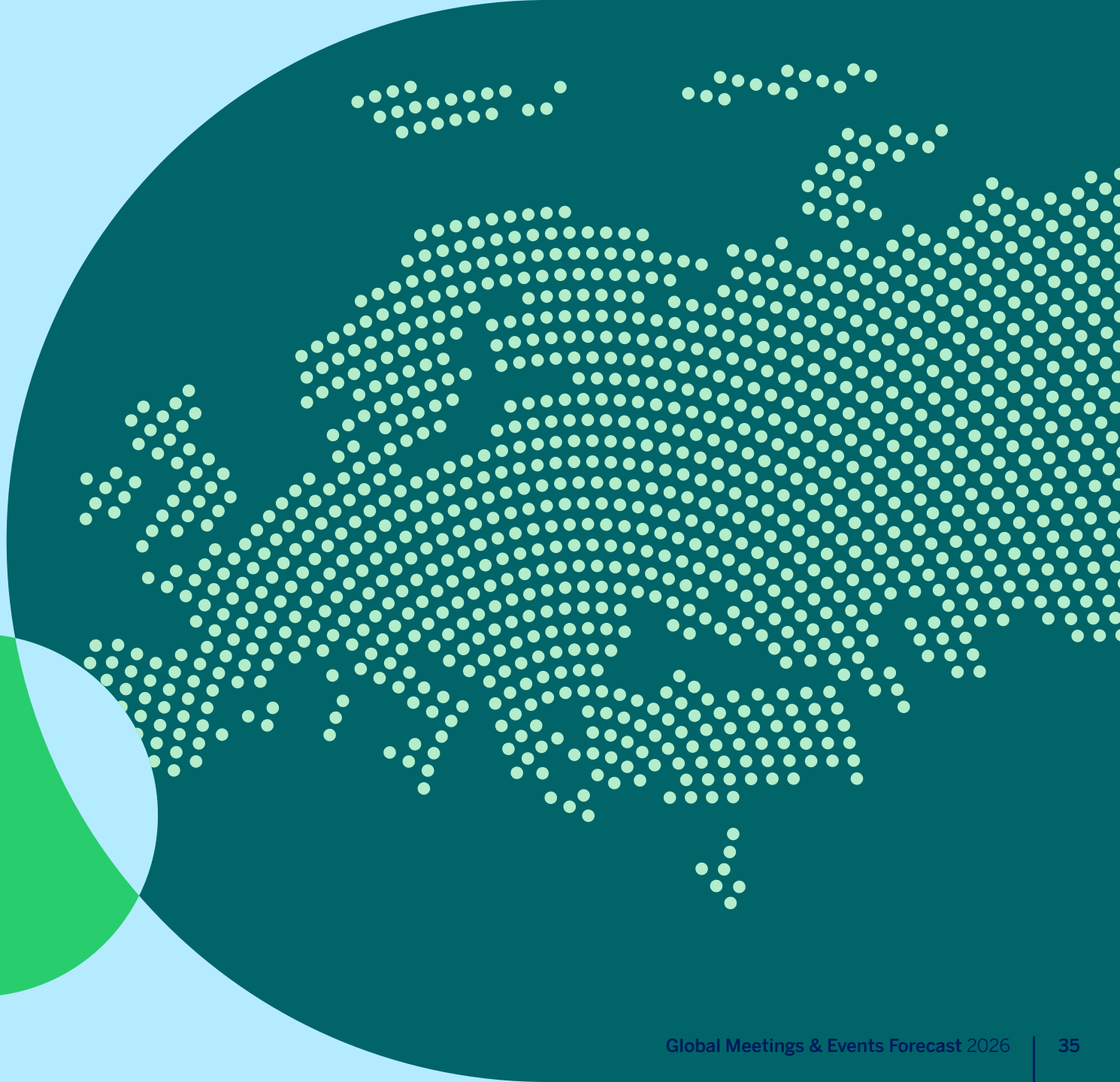
Top priorities

Given inflation concerns, it's no surprise that meeting professionals are targeting cost reduction and savings. AI is a particular focus for conversations about productivity gains and cost controls. But meeting professionals are also exploring AI's role in service improvement and attendee experience. Speaking of experience, we're seeing growing demand for imaginative, unexpected venues that will have a real impact with attendees.



What to watch out for

2026 is a big year for sport. In February, the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games will take place across 25 venues in northern Italy. Leipzig will host the UEFA Conference League Final in May and the Commonwealth Games are coming to Glasgow in July and August. These major sporting events will likely have a significant impact on availability.



Asia Pacific

Outlook

Many customers in Asia Pacific increasingly view meetings and events as critical to business growth. But they are also more or less cost conscious than they were in the past, perhaps reflecting geopolitical and economic uncertainty.

Top priorities

Meeting professionals across the region face the same challenge as their peers globally – how to satisfy ever higher attendee expectations while rising costs, particularly for upper end venues and reduce the real value of meetings budgets. Sustainability is a recurring theme, also driven by rising client expectations. Technology will continue to play a central role in meetings, whether it's using AI to improve delivery and engagement on hybrid meeting formats or immersive technologies to deliver creative, more engaging experiences.



What to watch out for

2026 will bring multiple large-scale events to Asia Pacific which need to be on meeting professionals' agendas. These include Energy Week 2026 in Goa, India, in January, the Rugby League World Cup in Australia in February, the Boao Forum for Asia in Hainan, China, in March, and the Formula 1 Singapore Grand Prix in October. These major sporting events will likely have a significant impact on availability.



Acknowledgments

2026 interview panel and contributors

- Rich Atkinson-Toal, Global Vice President, Brand & Experience Studio, Amex GBT Meetings & Events
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- Rebecca DeLuca, Vice President of Destination Sales, Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority (LVCVA)
- Nandor Fejes, Lead Category Manager, Fleet & Travel, Grundfos
- Margit Glintborg, Lead Meeting Manager, Grundfos
- Julien Houdebine, Global Chief Sales & Revenue Officer, Accor
- McNeel Keenan, Vice President, Product Development, Cvent
- Jennifer Nelson, Vice President, Strategic Meetings, Amex GBT Meetings & Events
- Ariana Reed, Director, Global Customer Experience, Amex GBT Meetings & Events
- Frank Staud, Executive Vice President of Global Communications, Branding & Sponsoring, Stada
- Shannon Szoke, Director, Specialty Sales Channels - MICE, Sports & University, Military & Government, Tour, and Cruise, Delta Air Lines
- Eloísa Urrutia, Head of Sustainability, Amex GBT Meetings & Events
- Marcella Wiegand, Director, Client Management, Amex GBT Meetings & Events





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