

Meetings & Events Pulse Survey

Q4 2023

A report on what is currently driving
decisions in the global MICE industry.

246 responses collected Dec 2023/Jan 2024



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Key Insights



Planners employ diverse strategies to offset rising expenses

37% of planners report that they frequently opt for different destinations based on price. Some additional strategies include reducing F&B spend particularly with providing attendees with meal vouchers or dining gift cards, building in more leisure time, and reducing the number of events.



Notable shift towards shorter lead times post-pandemic

The post-pandemic landscape has led to 55% reporting shorter lead times. Planning timelines among planners vary, with 12% executing events in less than 3 months and 29% having a 4-6 month lead time.



International respondents have a greater focus on DEI

There are significant differences between US/Canada and international responses regarding DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) integration. 50% of international organizations incorporate DEI elements into at least half of their programs, versus 35% in the US/Canada. Comments highlight diverse efforts in diversity training, hiring practices, fostering respectful environments, and inclusive event practices.



Reducing plastic usage/waste is the primary sustainability goal

Sustainability practices align globally, with 43% of US/Canadian respondents incorporating sustainability in at least half or more of their programs and 57% of the international respondents reporting the same. Reducing plastic usage/waste is the top sustainability goal, with differences in priorities between the US/Canada and international respondents.



Chatbots dominate the MICE industry adoption of AI tools

The adoption of AI tools shows differences between the US/Canada and international responses. While 25% in the US/Canada use AI tools, 38% internationally indicate active usage. Chatbots are widely used, with some variations in preferences for other tools between the two regions.

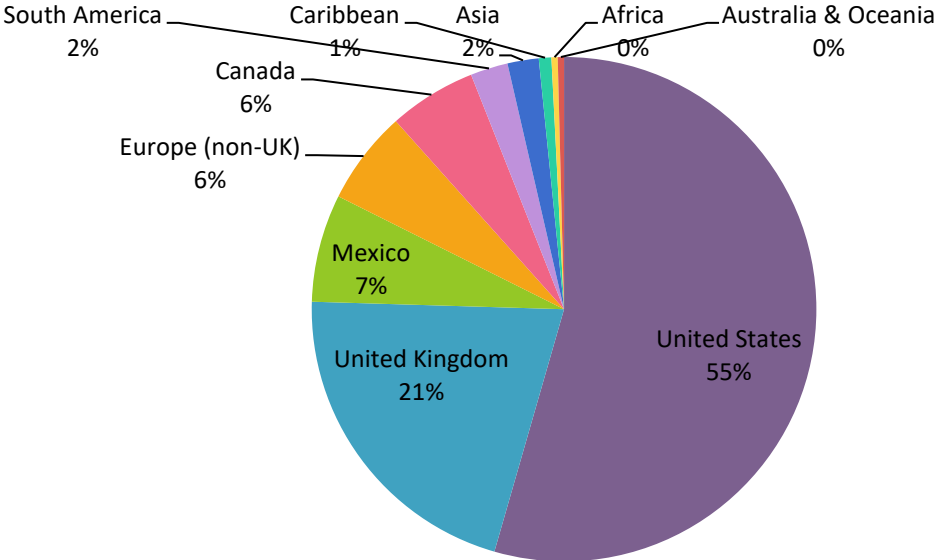


Respondent Demographics

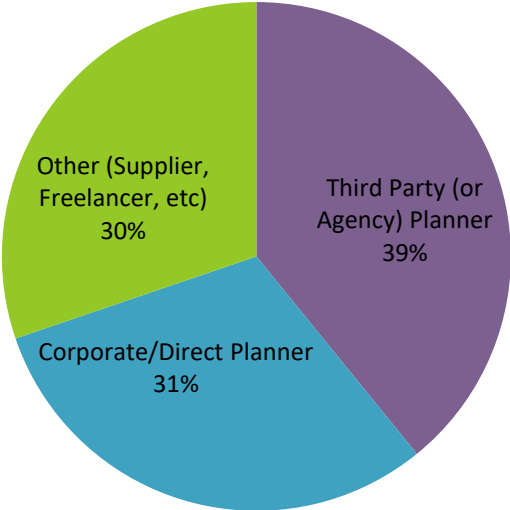
Highlights:

- 246 Meeting and Event Professionals
- Majority based in the United States or Canada with about 27% in Europe
- 31% Corporate/Direct Planners, 39% Third Party Planners, 30% Other (Freelancer, Supplier)

LOCATION



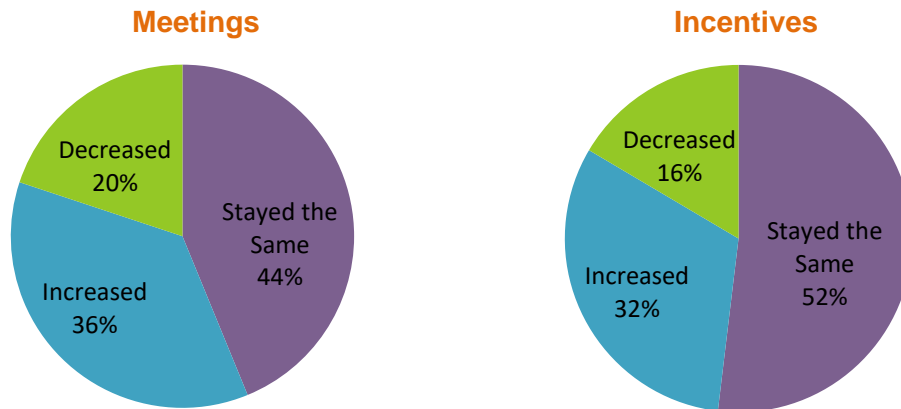
INDUSTRY



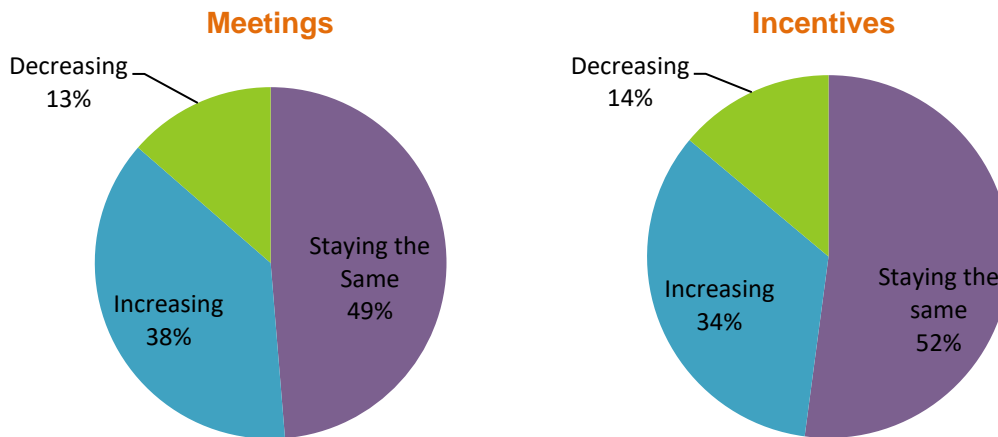
Budgets & Costs

In the midst of persistent cost challenges, a significant percentage of planners faced budget stagnation for meetings and incentives in 2023, with 44% and 52% indicating no change, respectively. Looking ahead to 2024, over 30% of planners expect an increase in meetings and incentives budgets. On average, about 50% of planners foresee that their budgets will remain the same for meetings and incentives from 2023 to 2024. Comments from respondents are below.

Did budgets increase across 2023?



Are budgets increasing from 2023 to 2024?



- Escalating costs in F&B, transportation, and hotel rates, leading to adjustments in program planning, including budget increases, program cuts, or seeking additional sponsorships.
- Many clients face pressure to maintain budgets despite increasing costs, creating tension between financial constraints and rising expenses.
- Some report budgets are falling short of keeping up with inflation.
- Clients are definitely being more cautious and it's challenging to get a direct answer [regarding budget].
- Reducing the duration of the programs and reconsidering member benefits due to the overall high costs.
- We removed gifts from our budget halfway through the year.

Cost Management Practices: Rating Frequency of Strategies to Offset Rising Costs

As planners face rising costs, the following table provides an overview of the frequency with which they implement various strategies.

| | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Most of the time | Almost always |
|--|-------|--------|-----------|------------------|---------------|
| Choosing different destinations | 1.9% | 6.6% | 38.7% | 37.3% | 15.6% |
| Providing meal vouchers / dining gift cards | 45.5% | 22.5% | 22.5% | 8.9% | 0.5% |
| Building in more leisure time | 17% | 15.1% | 45.3% | 18.4% | 4.2% |
| Reducing attendee numbers | 21.7% | 25% | 35.4% | 17% | 0.9% |
| Reducing the number of events/meetings per year | 17% | 25.5% | 42% | 12.3% | 3.3% |
| Changing the number of event/meetings per year (i.e.: going from four smaller meetings to one large meeting) | 19.3% | 25.5% | 39.2% | 12.7% | 3.3% |
| Changing in-person programs to virtual programs | 37.3% | 28.8% | 28.3% | 4.2% | 1.4% |

37-38% of planners choose different destinations based on price “sometimes” or “most of the time”, while the same percentage report “never” for shifting to virtual programs. Comments include:

- *Generally, we will see more need to be doing face-to-face interactions this year. Events will be a big part of sales and marketing plans but may see more intimate and personalized events happening.*
- *We have value in holding in-person events over virtual. For now, we are still having the same number of events as previously. We tried to combine the two and heard from our membership they still wanted both events.*
- *Changing in-person to virtual is an interesting one as we have seen clients do the opposite and go from virtual to in-person.*
- *I really do not like virtual meetings; they are cold and impersonal. We need to get back to live meetings, for the connection we make with members.*

Top Challenges

Higher costs continue to be the #1 challenge for planners, followed by budget management. Other challenges include finding availability, timely approval from decision-makers, contract negotiations, and responsiveness. Comments from respondents are below.

Rank the following planning challenges from most challenging to least challenging.

| Challenge | Overall Rank |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| Higher costs | 1 |
| Budget management | 2 |
| Finding availability | 3 |
| Timely approval from decision-makers | 4 |
| Contract negotiations | 5 |
| Responsiveness | 6 |
| Service levels/quality | 7 |
| Airline Travel/Schedules | 8 |
| Meeting participation/attendance | 9 |
| Vendor/supplier relationship | 10 |

- *Service levels drive the industry, and we see a lot of clients get frustrated with inflated costs and poor service. We have also seen some venues and hotels becoming short-sighted over profits/costs, which has been a big issue.*
- *Things got more expensive this year, and budgets stayed the same or went down. In particular, though, the responsiveness and turnaround speed of hotel and DMC contacts was noticeably slower this year.*
- *Financial constraints persist due to the aftermath of COVID-19, limiting budgets despite increased expenses.*

Destination Criteria

When sourcing destinations for programs, planners navigate diverse factors. The primary focus is destination pricing, covering costs such as F&B, accommodation, and taxes. Perceived experience/property quality follows closely. Flight costs, destination safety, flight availability, and geopolitics are all ranked closely. Comments from respondents are below.

What are your most important criteria for selecting or recommending a destination?

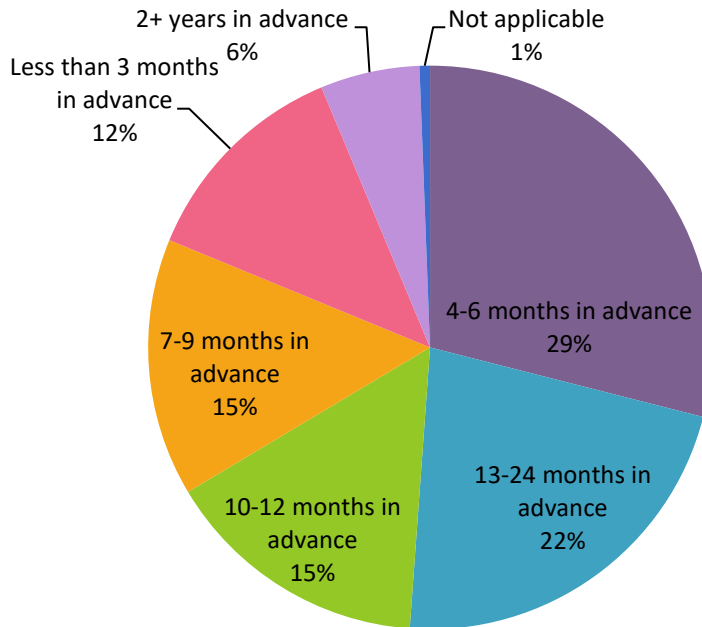
| Item | Overall Rank |
|--|--------------|
| Destination prices (F&B, accommodation, taxes) | 1 |
| Perceived quality of experience/property | 2 |
| Cost of flights/attendee travel | 3 |
| Perceived destination safety | 4 |
| Flight availability | 5 |
| Geopolitics/travel warnings | 6 |
| Previous knowledge of the destination | 7 |
| Availability or type of activities | 8 |
| Avoiding the same destination | 9 |
| Visas/entry requirements | 10 |

- *Safety is the top priority, followed by service levels.*
- *Our destinations are driven by where our members can conduct other business in addition to attending our meetings.*
- *Exotic destinations with a wow factor and uniqueness are highly valued.*
- *My client picks the same cities often as they have offices located all over the world that they would travel to.*

Lead Times

Survey results highlight a range of planning timelines with 12% executing events in less than 3 months and 29% favoring a 4-6 months lead time. These insights provide a glimpse into the varied planning horizons that planners are dealing with. Comments from respondents are below.

On average, how far in advance do you start planning most of your organization's or your clients' programs?

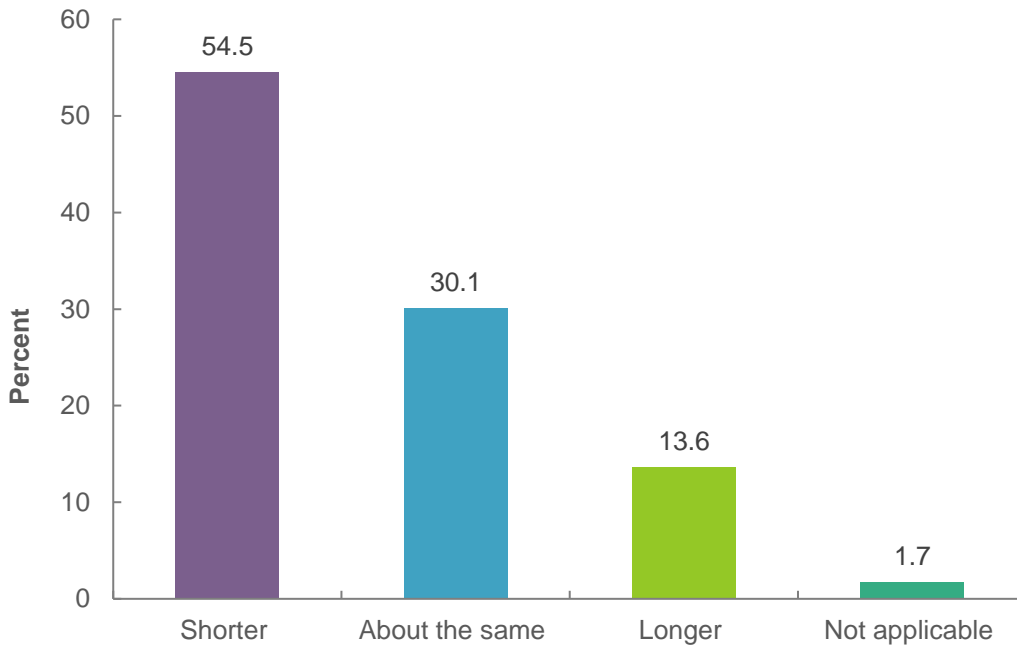


- *Recently we have had a surge of very short turnaround requests ranging from 1 - 3 months.*
- *Depending on program (meeting/incentive); hotel is normally booked about 10 - 12 months out, planning the onsite about 6 months; sometimes we have less.*
- *Incentive trips we plan 2 years out. Other programs range 6 months on average. We require 90-day notice at a minimum.*
- *We are usually at an average 12 weeks, a max of 16 weeks planning time.*

Post-Pandemic Lead Times Change

As the event landscape continues to evolve post-pandemic, this table outlines changes in planning lead times. A significant 55% report shorter times, while 30% note lead times remaining about the same. Comments from respondents are below.

Have your or your clients' lead times gotten longer or shorter compared to before the COVID pandemic?



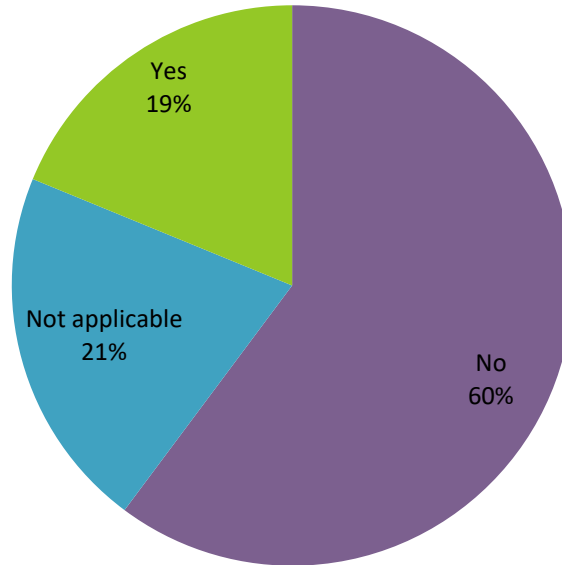
The comments from respondents, reflecting quite varied sentiments, provide additional insights and perspectives:

- *Continuous changes in budgets and restructurings have made our lead times much shorter since the pandemic.*
- *Longer sometimes, depending on the meeting, destination, and other contingencies/adjacencies/dependencies.*
- *Much shorter, and much more volatile, i.e. more meetings sourced that end up not actualizing.*
- *We struggle to find the right hotels available, so clients are sourcing for 2026 and beyond now whereas in the past they would only source one year out.*

Effect of Remote/Hybrid Attendees on Planning

Accommodating remote/hybrid attendees can sometimes affect the planning process. A majority of 60% report no impact, while 19% acknowledge a direct influence. Below are insightful comments from respondents shedding light on diverse experiences and challenges related to remote and hybrid event planning.

Has accommodating remote/hybrid attendees impacted your planning?



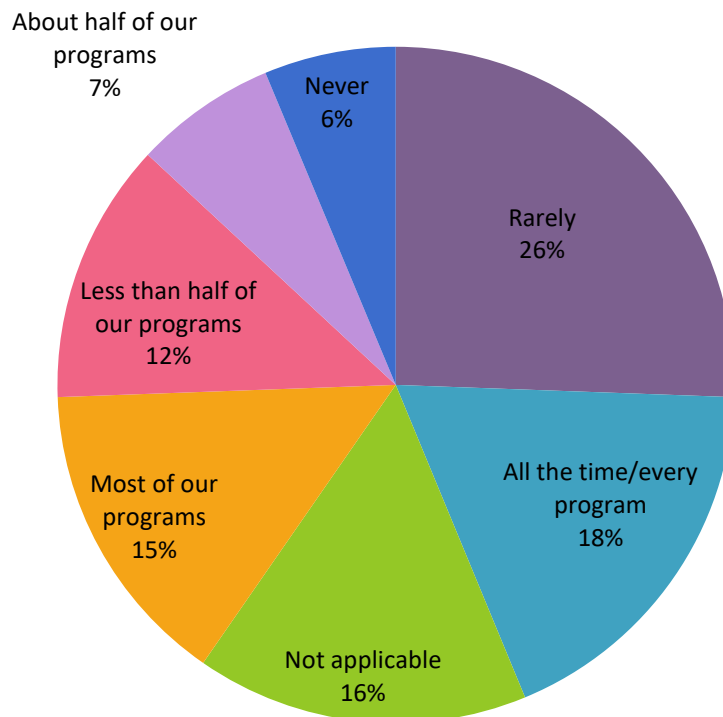
Organizations face diverse experiences and challenges with remote and hybrid events, with some expressing difficulties in seamlessly integrating virtual elements into in-person gatherings, increased costs, and complexity associated with hybrid setups.

- *The cost of a hybrid meeting is much higher with the A/V components. In addition, estimating the number of hotel rooms, meals, etc. is difficult to determine if people are offered a virtual option.*
- *Having to incorporate virtual pieces into the events and finding out how to make their experience just as special as in-person has been tricky!*
- *Budget for good stable internet. Prices are through the roof.*
- *We stopped doing hybrid events because we weren't doing them well. Now we do virtual and in-person events separately.*
- *Having to incorporate virtual pieces into the events and finding out how to make their experience just as special as in-person has been tricky!*
- *Higher A/V budget, more complex setup, additional workforce.*
- *It's not always easy to do for some meeting types. I prefer virtual-only or live-only for certain meetings. More time is needed to plan to make the hybrid work well for all attendees.*
- *Inflated A/V costs to be able to make committee meetings hybrid.*

DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion)

In our assessment of DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) and accessibility integration, the data reveals varied approaches among organizations. Notably, 40% of planners report incorporating DEI elements in at least half of their programs, while only 6% report they never do. Comments from respondents are below.

How often is your organization or your clients' organizations incorporating DEI and accessibility elements into programs?



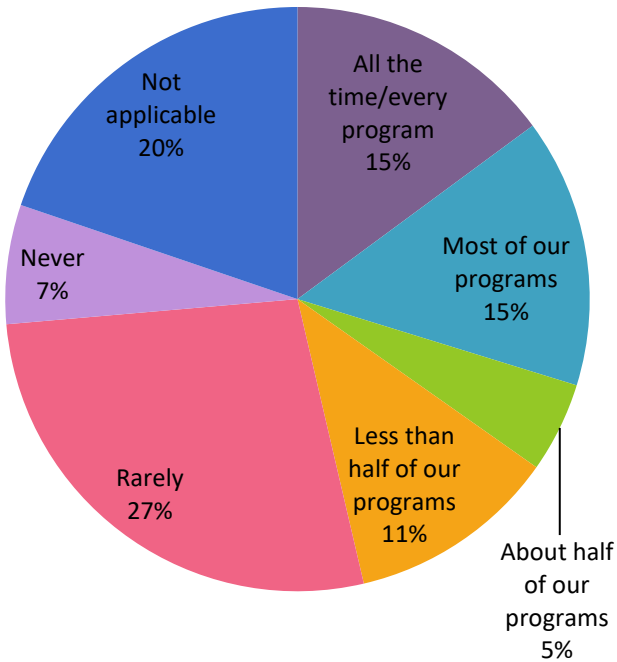
Respondents share a consensus on DEI in programs emphasizing team training and education. Common practices include diverse hiring, creating respectful work environments, and selecting diverse speakers.

- *DEI & accessibility are incorporated into programs with diversity training, diverse hiring practices, respectful work environments, and by encouraging open conversations & feedback from staff. We book accessible venues and feature diverse speakers at events.*
- *DEI: When selecting speakers/presenters we look across the spectrum of experts to ensure DEI is represented. Accessibility: I work with the company's regulations regarding accessibility from flights to hotel rooms to seating at meetings or meals.*
- *We continuously educate our team on DEI and accessibility best practices and stay updated with the latest trends and requirements in this evolving field.*
- *We include an equality question on our RFP.*
- *ASL interpretation, wheelchair accessibility in all session rooms, APAC delegation coordination, and women-in-tech receptions.*
- *Closed captioning, spacing between seats, inclusivity in activities.*
- *Avoiding all religious holidays, offering prayer rooms and special meals, and accommodating if attendee needs to leave or arrive early due to beliefs.*

DEI: US/Canada vs. International Respondents

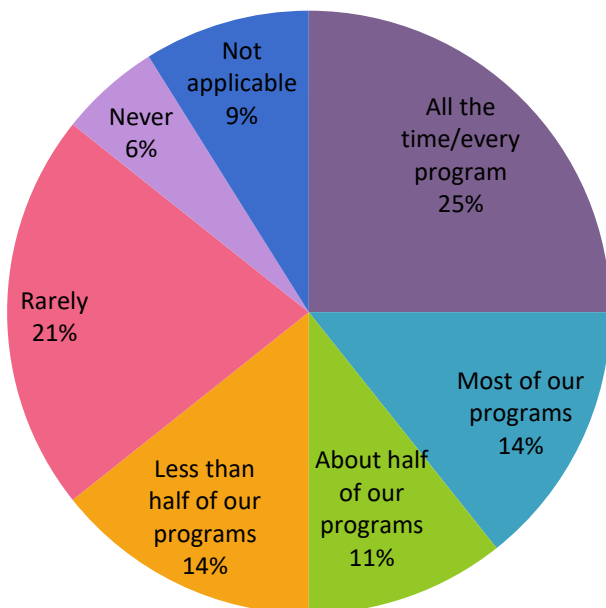
Notably, 25% of international organizations incorporate DEI elements in every program, showcasing a 10% difference compared to the 15% in the US/Canada. Conversely, in the US/Canada, 27% reported rarely implementing DEI, a 6% difference compared to the international respondents. Some comments from respondents are below.

US/CANADA



- In the US/Canadian regions, 35% of planners incorporate DEI elements in at least half of their programs.

INTERNATIONAL

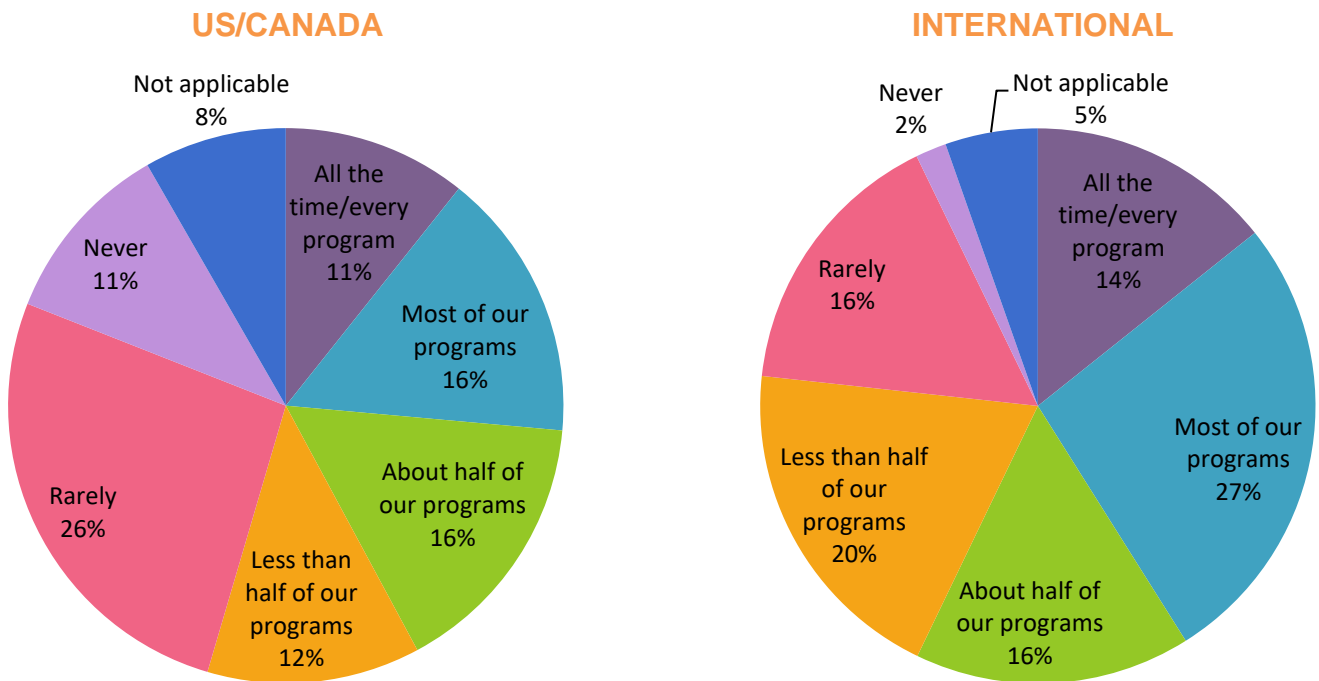


- Notably, 50% of international respondents incorporate DEI elements into at least half of their programs.

Sustainability

Responses on sustainability practices reveal diverse commitment levels and approaches when we compare the US/Canadian and international responses. 43% of US/Canadian respondents incorporate sustainability in at least half of their programs, with 57% of the international respondents reporting the same. Additionally, 8% of organizations in the US/Canada indicate that they do not integrate sustainability practices, whereas only 2% of their international counterparts make a similar report. Comments from respondents are below.

How often is your organization or your clients' organizations incorporating sustainability into programs?



- *I try to incorporate this into programs. If anything can be reused, recycled or upcycled, I'll suggest this to clients.*
- *It's important to us but we haven't spent much time or effort on it yet. This is an area that we are hoping to focus more on in the future.*
- *It's a key KPI for most of our clients.*
- *[We] have a sustainable events policy and checklist (same as you would for H&S) that we go through for each event.*
- *We have gone nearly entirely paperless at meetings, reducing wastage and we take advantage of venue opportunities to reduce carbon emissions.*
- *Currently, with our US clients, sustainability is not something that weighs on their decision making.*

Reducing plastic usage/waste stands out as the foremost sustainability goal for organizations internationally and in the US/Canada. Following closely are priorities such as reusing/recycling event materials and opting for locally sourced food. Rankings of sustainability goals are as follows:

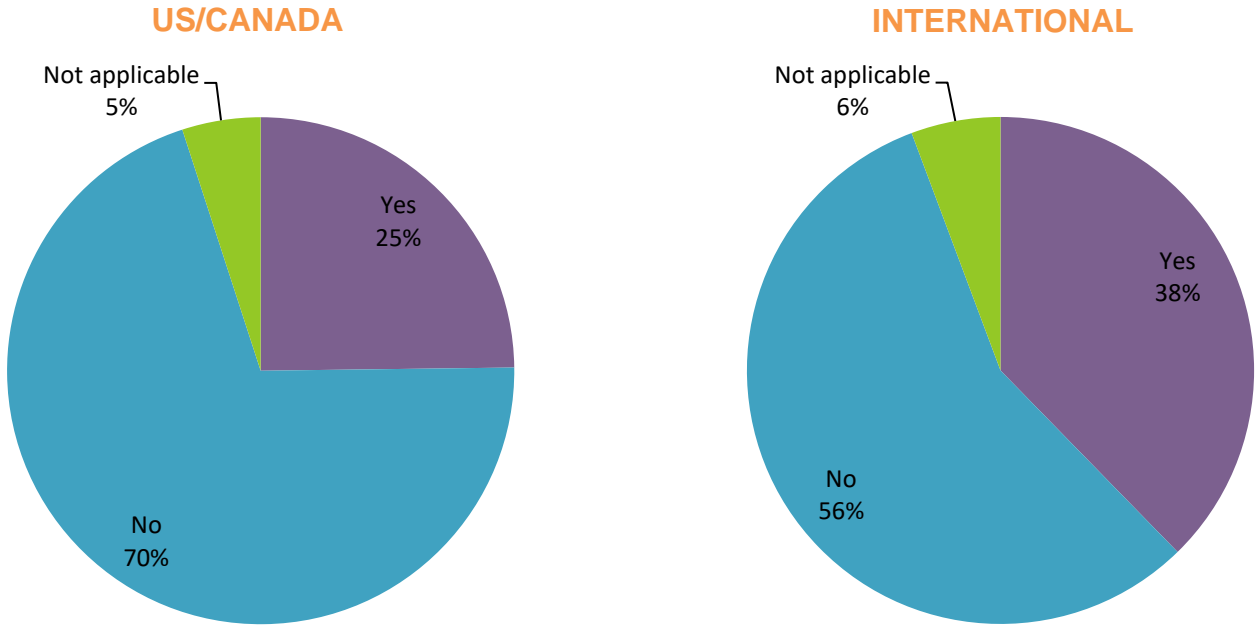
Out of the list below, please rank how important the following sustainability goals are to your organization and/or your client's organization.

| Goal | Rank |
|---|-------------|
| Reducing plastic usage/waste | 1 |
| Finding ways to reuse/recycle event materials/goods | 2 |
| Locally sourced food options | 3 |
| Selecting program components within walking distance | 4 |
| Donations to local organizations | 5 |
| Carbon tracking & offsetting | 6 |
| Plant-based food options | 7 |
| Only working with vendors that have sustainable efforts in place (but are not certified) | 8 |
| Only working with certified sustainable vendors | 9 |
| Hybrid/electric transportation | 10 |

AI Tools

The adoption of AI tools in the industry showcases significant differences between US/Canada and international responses, with a higher adaptation rate internationally. In the US/Canada, 25% of organizations have embraced AI tools, whereas internationally, a comparatively higher 38% indicate active usage. Conversely, 70% in the US/Canada and 56% internationally have yet to incorporate AI tools.

Are you using AI (ex: ChatGPT) tools in your day-to-day job?



Most Used AI Tools

Chatbots are widely used, with over 80% adoption in both sectors. Grammar checkers and rewording tools are 15% more preferred in the US/Canada than internationally. Image generation tools also favor the US/Canada by 18.3%. In video creation tools, international respondents have a 15% higher usage. Other differences can be seen below:

| Value | US/Canada Response | International Response |
|--|--------------------|------------------------|
| Chatbots (i.e. Chat GPT) | 83.3% | 85% |
| Grammar checkers and rewording tools (i.e.: Grammarly, Wordtune) | 30% | 15% |
| Image generation (i.e.: DALL-E 2, Midjourney) | 63.3% | 45% |
| Content creation (i.e.: Jasper, Copy.ai) | 20% | 15% |
| Video creation (i.e.: Descript, Opus, Visla) | 20% | 35% |
| Note takers (i.e.: Fathom, Fireflies) | 10% | 5% |
| Other | 3.3% | 5% |

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A graphic element consisting of a series of dots in blue and orange, arranged in a curved, arrow-like shape pointing towards the top right.

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