

# CONFERENCES: CATALYSTS FOR THRIVING ECONOMIES ASSOCIATIONS

*As the voice for different industry sectors, associations understand the power of business events.*

Events showcase research, highlight findings, build the profiles of local individuals as well as their association, improve sector knowledge, gather expertise, provide professional development opportunities, attract media coverage and foster international collaborations.

Starting in 2010, Business Events Sydney (BESydney) commissioned University of Technology Sydney (UTS) to undertake a number of research projects in order to define the true legacy of business events beyond the specific information exchange that occurs during conference sessions. The most recent project, *Conferences: catalysts for thriving economies*, surveyed delegates who attended selected conferences held in 2014-15 to evaluate both the 'hard' and 'soft' benefits that contribute to the co-creation of value by international conference delegates.

## OUTCOMES

The evaluation of business events without taking into account these wider and longer-term benefits seriously underestimates their real value to delegates, government and the community. The research below clearly supports the observations that business events leave legacies with important and far-reaching outcomes for smart and thriving economies.

### 1. Conferences provide delegates with new ideas and knowledge

Overwhelmingly, respondents considered the conference to have exposed them to new ideas (91%) and knowledge (93%).

### 2. Conferences contribute to better international collaboration by facilitating the formation of global research and business networks

A large majority (76%) agreed that the conference supported the development of global research and business collaborations.

### 3. Conferences promote local sector expertise to an international audience

The ability of a conference to showcase the local sector's expertise to a global audience was acknowledged by 83%.

### 4. Conferences develop the skills and knowledge of current practitioners and those of the future

Of the surveyed sample, 68% agreed that the conference developed the knowledge and capabilities of early career delegates immediately, while 52% observed that they developed professional practices that enhanced community outcomes.

### 5. Conferences raise the profile of the association and its causes within government

Conferences draw media and community attention to specific topics of interest, often galvanising government into action to create or change policy and, in some cases, commit funding. This has been evidenced in a number of conferences held in Sydney over the last few years, with Australian Government commitments to specific initiatives regarding:

- HIV (4th International AIDS Society Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention)
- Obesity (10th International Congress on Obesity)
- Environmental conservation (6th IUCN World Parks Congress)
- Polio eradication (105th Rotary International Convention).

### 6. Conferences enable associations to generate income for use in other cause-related projects

The Australian profits from the XXIX International Congress of Ophthalmology were used to set up the Eye Foundation, which today represents 890 Australian and NZ Ophthalmologists. The foundation funds ground-breaking research into the major causes of blindness and participates in sustainable eye care development projects in disadvantaged communities in Australia and overseas.

### 7. Conferences attract international expertise to the host destination – not solely for the purposes of the conference, but sometimes through attendees choosing to relocate to the conference destination

Of the surveyed delegates, 41% would like to live and work/study in Sydney, while 7% have applied to work or study in Sydney. A conference showcases a destination as an alternative place to live – either for personal or professional reasons. This can then enhance the local expertise on a permanent or semi-permanent basis.

### 8. Conferences provide valuable opportunities for businesses to find new customers and contacts

A quarter of exhibitors said they increased sales and 41% made sales contacts. This clearly demonstrates return on investment to prospective exhibitors, and thereby attracts sponsorship and support for conferences.

### 9. Conferences facilitate the connection of research with business, thereby assisting the translation of research and innovation into commercial outcomes

Australia's National Innovation and Science Agenda recognises the need for better collaboration between industry and research to create more profitable, sustainable and export-focussed industries. The Agenda "is encouraging the best and brightest minds to work together to find solutions to real world problems and to create jobs and growth. One of the most effective ways for the best and brightest to initiate, and then develop, collaboration is through conferences".

*“The World Conference for Lung Cancer in 2013 was a huge success here in Sydney. But going beyond the event, there have been lasting benefits. Many of us have made all sorts of contacts with people from around the world, and that has led to research studies and research collaborations that just simply wouldn’t have existed had the conference not taken place.”*

— Professor Michael Boyer AM, Chief Clinical Officer, Chris O’Brien Lifehouse, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, and BESydney Ambassador



*“Together with many of the university’s best minds, outstanding researchers from across Australia and internationally are working to develop research and education programs that do not just add incrementally to the knowledge base, but generate major shifts in our understanding.”*

— University of Sydney Vice-Chancellor Michael Spence, referring to the Charles Perkins Centre

*“We find that conferences are extraordinarily valuable in terms of our ability to network with individuals, because they bring the world to us and bring us to the world at the same time.”*

— Professor John Mattick, Garvan Institute of Medical Research, and BESydney Ambassador

