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U.S. Election Outcome Yields Hope, But Plans for In-Person Events Shift to Later in '21

While most planners believe meetings can be held safely today, few will travel for business in 2020.

by [Loren G. Edelstein](#)

November 19, 2020

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Planners who intended to hold in-person or hybrid meetings in the near future have adjusted their expectations — again — as Covid-19 numbers continue to rise. Although hopeful for positive change under the Biden administration, fewer than half of the 850 respondents to [Northstar's latest Pulse Survey](#) anticipate holding meetings and events with an in-person audience before Q3 2021, slightly down from 55 percent [a month ago](#). One in four won't hold meetings until Q4 2021 or later, up from 16 percent in October.

This latest version of the survey was conducted from Oct. 22 through Nov. 18. Northstar established the Pulse Survey in March 2020 to gauge and track the industry's response to the pandemic. **View the complete research results [here](#), as well as previous findings [here](#).**

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Following are the latest takeaways.

Rebooking Is Still Job #1

Rescheduling or rebooking events is still the primary job responsibility of 37 percent of respondents, up slightly over the past two months. A consistent 32 percent are “not currently focused on live events.” Just 7 percent say booking new events is now their priority.

Many Are Hopeful for Change with the New Administration

The Biden administration will enact measures to address the pandemic and bring positive changes to the meetings and hospitality industry, 41 percent of respondents believe. Another 36 percent aren't sure what to expect, but they're hopeful.

Noted one respondent: “It doesn't matter who is in office; a pandemic is a pandemic.”

Said another, “The election itself will not bring positive changes. It is our own mission to do that.”

Most Believe We Should Be Meeting

Whether or not our industry associations should be holding meetings — and demonstrating best practices to educate buyers and suppliers — is the subject of hot debate. (See related story, [“Should We Be Holding In-Person Meetings?”](#)) Two-thirds of planners say we should be meeting, with 15 percent responding “absolutely; we need to get back to business,” and nearly half (48 percent) saying “yes, if proper protocols are followed and enforced.”

Among the 30 percent who believe in-person meetings are irresponsible, many added comments. Among them: “Arguing that we need to ‘get back to business’ is gross when juxtaposed as a binary decision between making money and public safety” and “I know this will be perceived as heresy, but I think it's inappropriate to consider any sort of in-person meetings until the Covid-19 vaccine is widely available and people are getting it.”

Planners Themselves Will Stay Home

Even as a majority believe the meetings industry should go ahead with in-person events, 71 percent don't plan to attend any meetings or business events this year.

"I want to see science on the protocols limiting spread of the virus first," said one planner. Another noted, "I'm concerned with people not following the rules, not wearing masks and spreading this unnecessarily."

More Are Holding Virtual Meetings

Virtual events are increasingly common, with only 17 percent of respondents not involved in planning online meetings. In fact, 33 percent report that more than half of their events are now digital only, with another 26 percent planning online meetings exclusively.

However, their confidence in the effectiveness of virtual events has steadily declined month-over-month. On a five-point scale (1 = not at all confident; 5 = highly confident), planners rate online meetings a 2.98, slightly down from 3.13 in October.

Fear Is Among the Biggest Obstacles

Concerns about future events are many and varied. Planners' most prevalent worries are fear of contagion, restrictive budgets, limited or costly airline service, hotel availability and staffing, and fear of travel.

"I think the word 'fear' is being thrown around too much," noted one respondent. "I wish people would use the word 'safe.' I'm not fearful, but I want to be safe."

Among the hundreds of verbatim comments, many respondents acknowledged that significant changes are necessary for our business to move forward. "It's time for a rebirth," said one respondent. "What can we learn from this? What have we been distracted from that we can examine now to re-create the meeting experience?"

Download the latest results [here](#) or see results from previous surveys [here](#).

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