

News

California Tourism Industry Lobbies Governor for Reopening Plan

Without guidelines in place for resuming meetings, business events and conventions, the state is losing bookings for 2022 and beyond.



by [Michael J. Shapiro](#)

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California's Long Beach Bay Area

A slew of California tourism officials and union leaders are calling on [Gov. Gavin Newsom](#) to issue specific guidelines to clarify when meetings, business events and conventions can resume in the state. In an open [letter](#) to the governor signed by 130 tourism professionals – representing convention centers, CVBs, hotels, restaurants and more – the advocates said California is losing bookings to other states through 2022 and beyond, because of the uncertainty around reopening.

For every month the state delays opening for meetings, California is losing \$4.1 billion in economic activity, the letter states. That's based on two studies from Oxford Economics ([here](#) and [here](#)) that were released in October 2020. In 2019, the travel and meetings sector accounted for \$66.1 billion in direct spending in the state, and supported 457,000 jobs.

California has prohibited meetings of any size since March 2020, when the stay-at-home order went into effect.

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Gov. Newsom's [Blueprint for a Safer Economy](#) doesn't mention meetings, business events or conventions, the letter points out, and doesn't present guidelines for reopening the sector. The fact that the governor hasn't addressed this is causing event organizers to look elsewhere.

"We're not asking Gov. Newsom to open California to business meetings and events tomorrow; we're asking for a plan today so we can safely hold events in the future," said [Barb Newton](#), president and CEO of CalTravel, the association representing the state's travel and tourism industry. "These events bring more than just direct revenue and jobs. They bring people who spend money on hotel rooms, restaurants, local shops and services. The ripple effect is huge and benefits both large and small communities – but we're losing the benefits to other states."

While other states have been allowing safe business meetings to be held, California's government has yet to adopt or approve a plan developed by the state's travel industry in June 2020. According to the group behind the letter, that plan outlined how the state could host safe meetings, adhering to standards established by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and the [California Department of Public Health](#).

"Every day I'm on the phone with someone trying to convince them to not cancel and take their business to another state," said [Steve Goodling](#), president and CEO of the [Long Beach Area Convention and Visitors Bureau](#). "We need the governor to provide guidelines to signal to our customers that California will one day be open to hosting events. We want the jobs and revenue here in California, not other states."



Julie Coker, president and CEO, San Diego Tourism Authority

"Over 40 meetings representing 13,481 jobs have cancelled so far, and we are now losing groups for the fourth quarter of 2021," added [Scott White](#), president and CEO of the Greater Palm Springs Convention and Visitors Bureau.

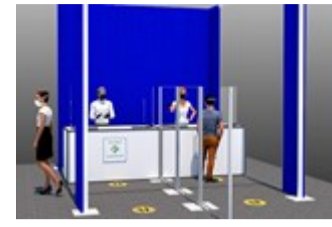
Those trends will continue until the state offers responsible reopening guidelines, cautioned [Julie Coker](#), president and CEO of the San Diego Tourism Authority. "There's too much at stake for California to be the outlier among states with no guidance. The economy is revving up, our clients want to book business

meetings and conventions, but we can't accommodate them. We are losing out on revenue and jobs."

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