



# Insights into the future of business events in Canada:

## A planner pulse check in the era of COVID-19

AUGUST 2020



49°17'21.1"N 123°07'01.6"W

Vancouver Convention Centre

Vancouver

British Columbia

# Introduction

Between August 4 – 24, 2020, Destination Canada conducted a series of online surveys targeting international (US and other countries) event organizers in the association, corporate, and incentive market segments. The objective was to update insights gained from focus groups conducted in May and look for signs of industry recovery. We have received a total of 188 responses with key findings enclosed.

# Executive Summary

## Outlook as of August, 2020

There continues to be opportunity for Canada. Organizers want to hear from Canadian destinations and suppliers with information about the delegate journey. Since planners view Canada as one of the most desirable international destinations, organizers are looking at Canada for knowledge and inspiration. But above all, they want to learn about travelling safely amid the COVID-19 situation, specifically what Canadian destinations are doing to ensure the safe return of in-person events and how Canadian leadership and innovation in thriving sectors can help their organizations/membership rebound.

### **UNCERTAINTY REMAINS, PLANNERS BEGINNING TO CONSIDER THE FUTURE**

The focus for the majority of organizers is still on rebooking and rescheduling events. The timing of the return to business events continues to fluctuate with event organizers looking further out into the horizon from Q3 2021 onwards to plan new events.

Since many organizers researching future events are open to international locations it is important that business development efforts continue and brand presence remains strong in international markets.

- 2021-2023 stands out as the primary focus years among those planners who are currently researching future locations.
- For planners whose primary focus is sourcing and considering international destinations, 2025 is of particular interest, however planners listed open years from 2021 - 2026+.

### **CANADA IS CONSIDERED A DESTINATION OF CHOICE BY 63% OF PLANNERS RESEARCHING DESTINATIONS**

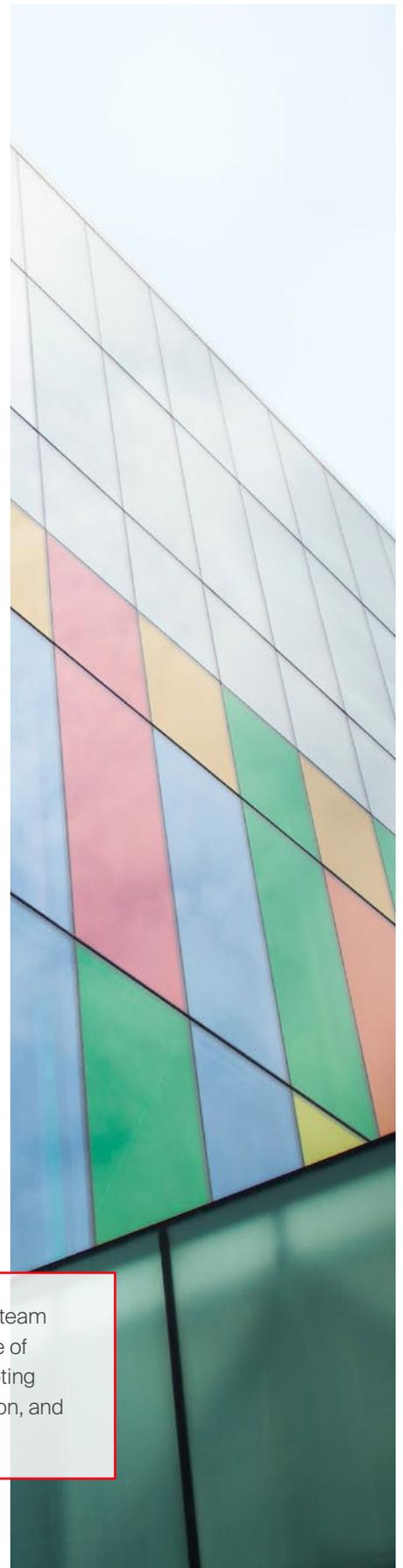
- 25% of our respondents indicated they are relocating events confirmed from other regions outside of North America to destinations within North America.
  - 73% of those same respondents are open to considering Canada.



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Executive Director, Business Events  
Destination Canada



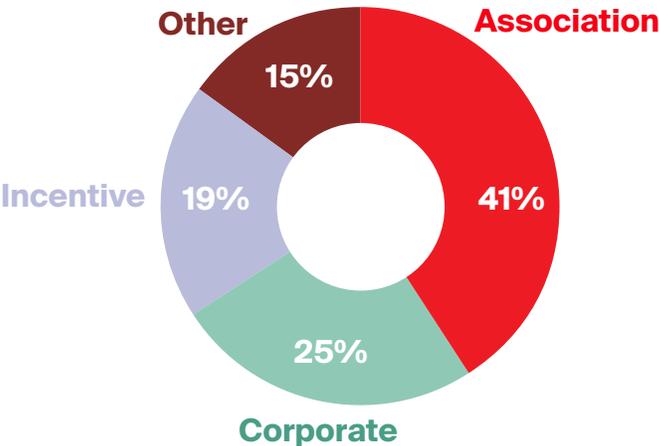
Destination Canada's Business Events team is charged with growing Canada's share of international business events by promoting the country's unique meeting, convention, and incentive event possibilities.



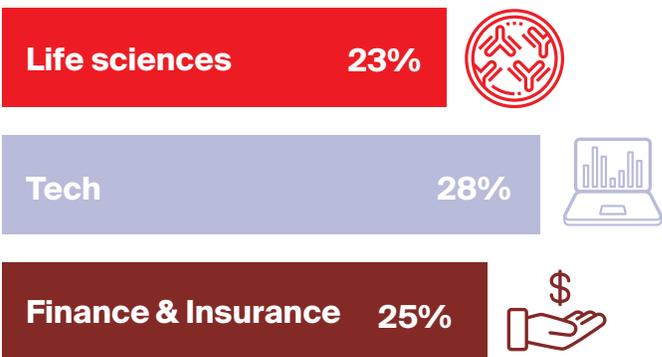


# Demographics

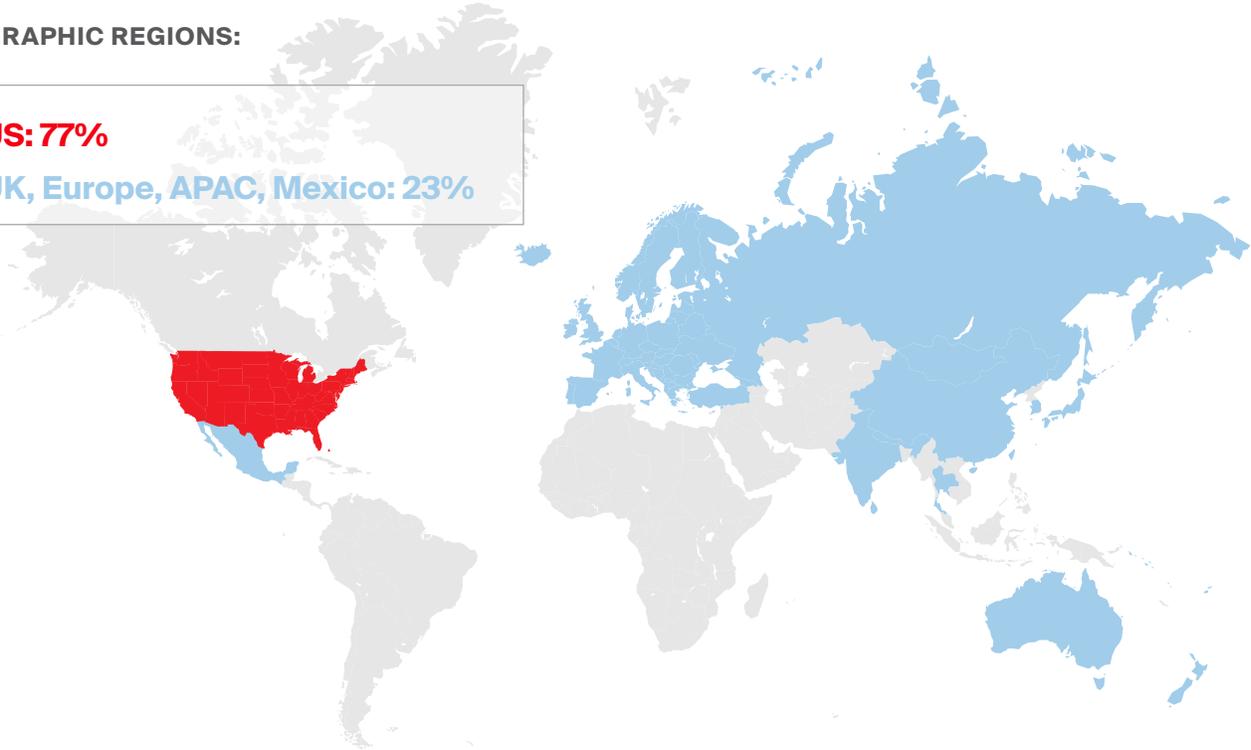
## RESPONDING MARKETS:



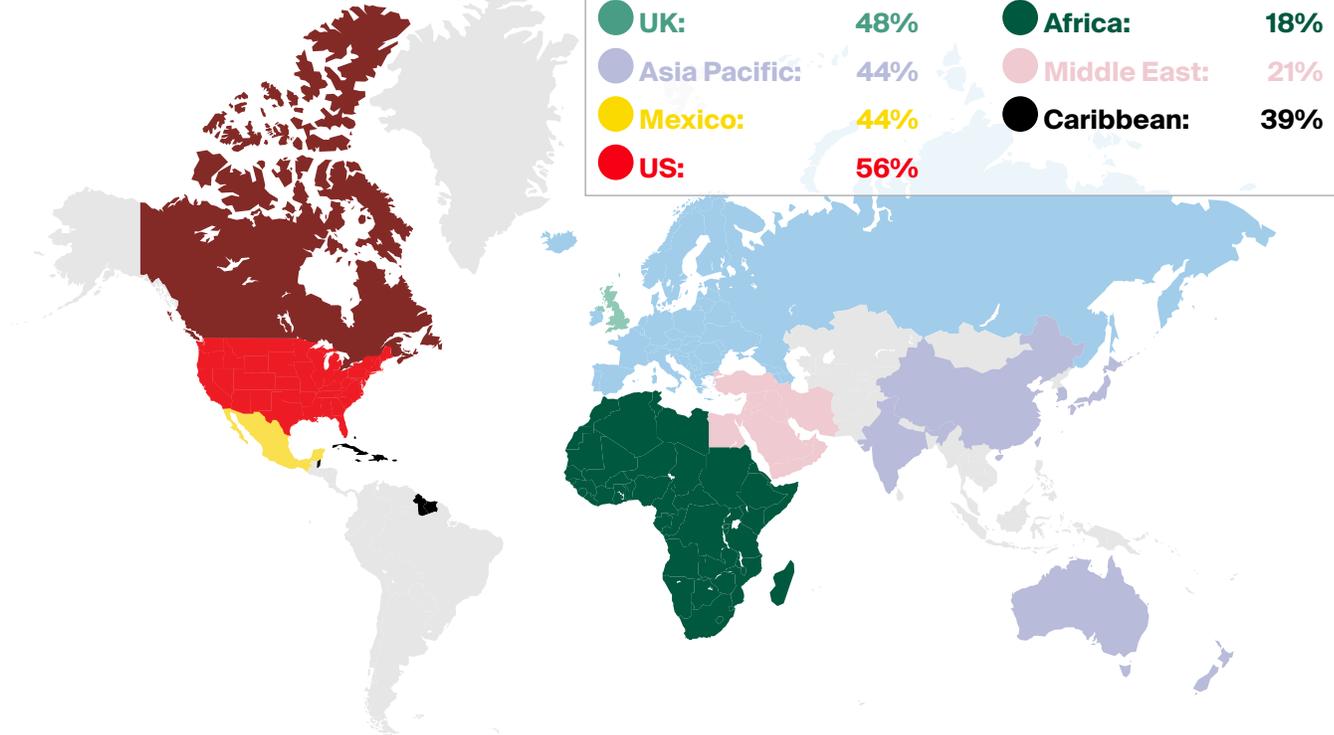
## TOP SECTORS IDENTIFIED:



## GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS:

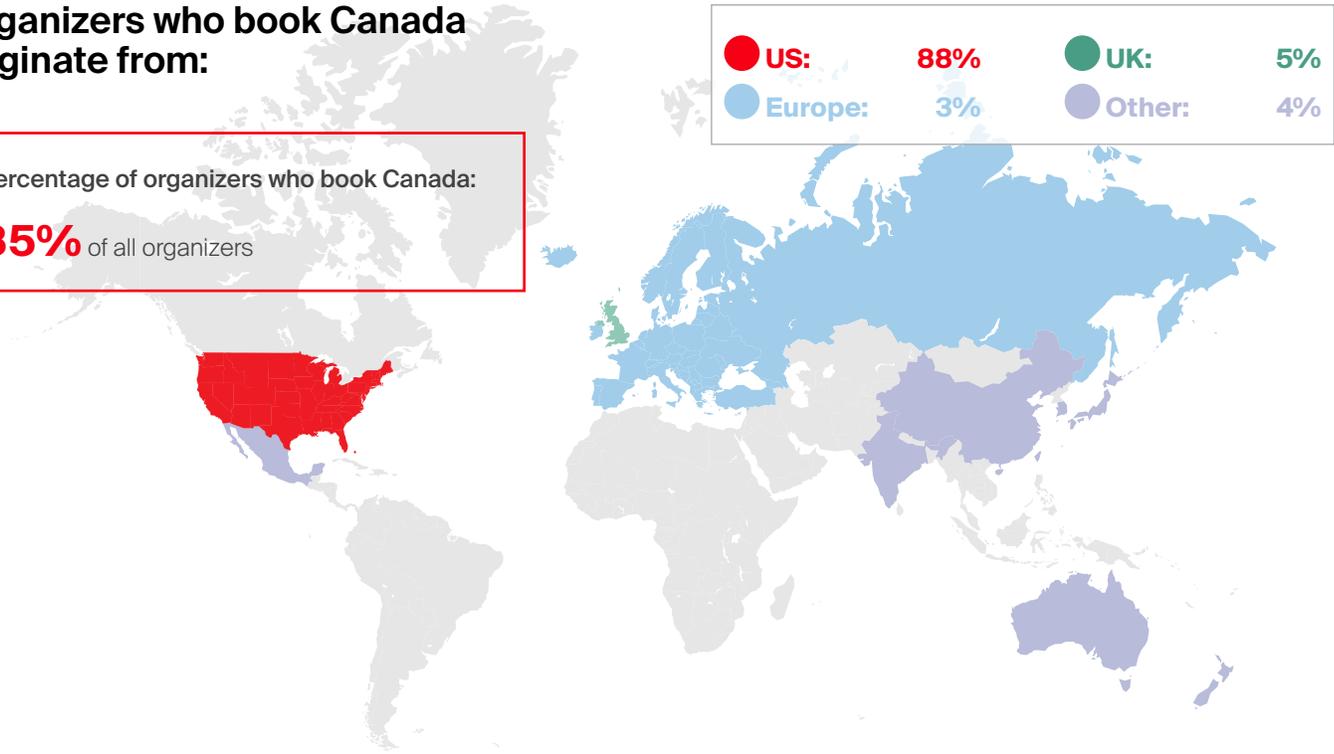


### Countries booked by organizers for international business events



### Organizers who book Canada originate from:

Percentage of organizers who book Canada:  
**85%** of all organizers





**Canada is also a primary choice for incentive travel programs.**  
**Over 90%** of respondents have either booked incentive programs in Canada, or are considering doing so in the future.

## The future use of third party planners

Most of our respondents who identified as association or corporate organizers (62%) do not use a third party/agency for sourcing or planning events and do it in-house. Of those that do use a third party/agency for sourcing or planning events:



**31%** of association & corporate organizers polled indicated that they will continue to use 3<sup>rd</sup> party planners.



**5%** of association & corporate organizers polled will move planning in-house.



**2%** of association & corporate organizers polled are unsure of their plans.

For incentive organizers,



**57%** intend to continue using 3<sup>rd</sup> party planners.



**7%** are in the process of moving planning in-house.



Looking forward to the next two years, results suggest a growing trend toward moving planning internally as reported by 23% of polled incentive organizers.

## Shuffling the deck: rescheduling contracted events

Nearly half of the event organizers polled continue to rebook/reschedule 2020 events across all markets.

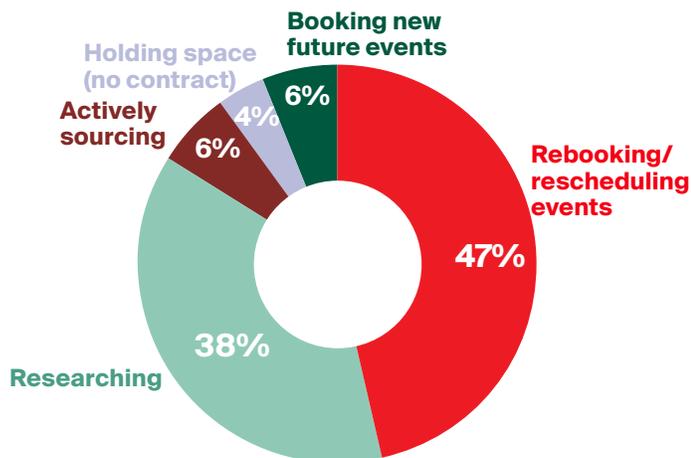
The rebooking/rescheduling of events is primarily seen in:

**Q3 2021**, followed by **Q2 2021**, **Q1 2021**

A significant number of events that were already confirmed in 2021 are also being moved to a later time:

**Q1 2022** and **Q2 2022**

### PRIMARY FOCUS



### TYPE OF EVENTS BEING RESCHEDULED:

Large, international events	<b>45%</b>
National events	<b>36%</b>
Local/regional events	<b>Little movement</b>

## Opportunity for Canada!

**25%** of our respondents indicated they are relocating events confirmed for regions outside of North America to destinations in North America.

**73%** of those same respondents are open to considering Canada for these events.

## Recovery Signals

### Research:



**38%** of respondents are currently conducting research for future events.



**45%** of these are open to international locations.



**63%** of these respondents are interested in Canada.



**17%** indicate they are planning events close to headquarter locations.

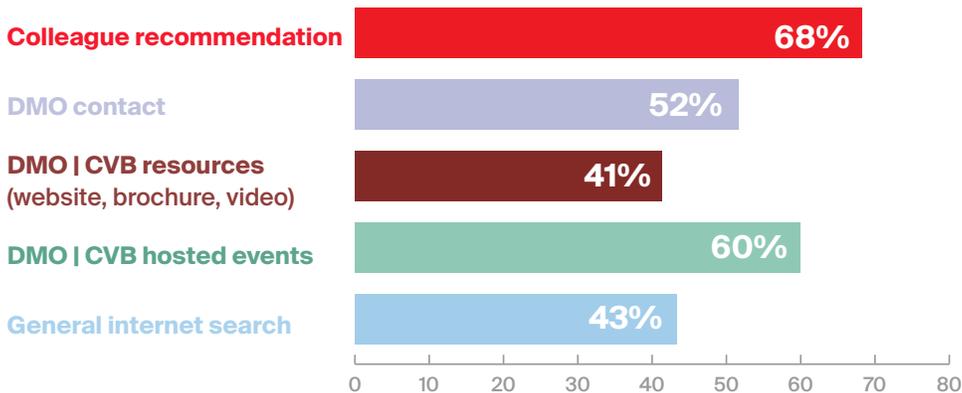
### Sourcing:

Actively sourcing events: **nearly 6%**

Holding space (not contracted): **3.5%**

### SEEKING RECOMMENDATIONS:

Over sixty-eight per cent (68%) of organizers in our survey groups turn to word-of-mouth and their industry colleagues when seeking recommendations.\*



\*In-person activities/interactions remain a very important factor (55%).

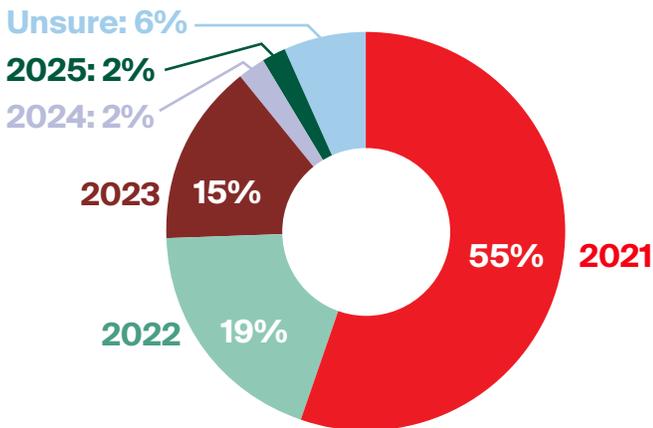
## The slow return of in-person events

The organizers who responded to the Destination Canada survey believe that national and regional events, both corporate and association, will be the first to resume, with the corporate segment leading the way by far. Local and regional incentive business is predicted to resume much slower.

On the international side, corporate and incentive is far behind associations. Over 43% respondents believe large international corporate meetings will be the slowest to come back and incentive will be lagging as well. According to this survey, international association events will come back sooner. This may be influenced by larger number of planners working with associations that are more optimistic of an association return.

In the immediate future, those planners researching international destinations and those considering Canada showed Q2 and Q3 2021 are the strongest when it comes to planners looking at future locations for an event (23 and 21%); 2021 itself is still showing as the strongest open year for many planners. We believe these are planners who had to move events from 2020 and are still deciding on when and where to hold them next year. Planners are also researching for new events in 2022 and 2023 indicating an opportunity for business development and brand presence.

### PRIMARY FOCUS: RESEARCHING NEW EVENTS



Looking further down the road, 2023 stands out as the primary focus years among those planners who are currently researching future locations. This coincides with years showing as next open for many planners along with (2022, 2025, 2026+). It is important that business development and marketing efforts continue now as some planners continue to look ahead at their future international business events.

Despite evidence of increased activity across all segments, uncertainty remains strong creating planner inertia. Half of our respondents already have space on hold for future years, however 67% were unsure about moving forward with contracts or next steps.



### Canada remains a fan favourite

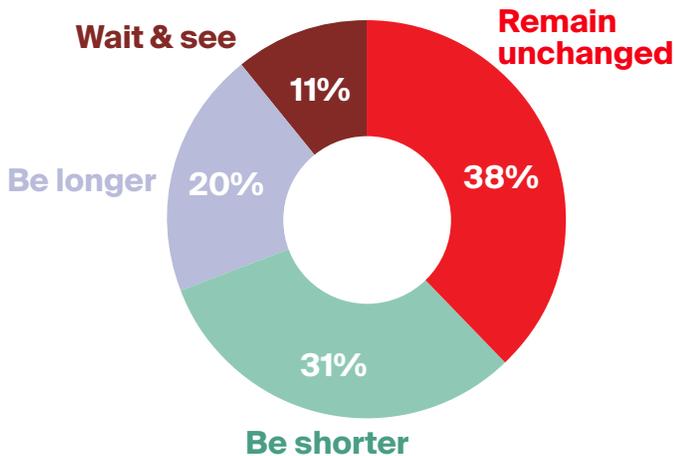
Canada ranks highly as a destination of choice by more than 93% of respondents. When it comes to future years, the majority of planners (70%) are comfortable with looking at international locations, with 86% of those planners open to considering Canada.

## The next 18 months

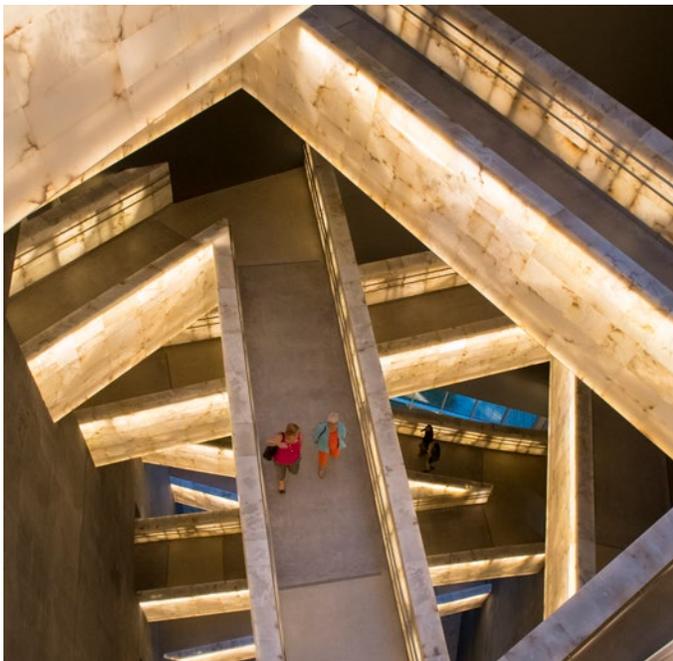
Many planners (over 46%) believe their events will change. The virtual component to meetings will now become more common in programming. Over 60% of the planners surveyed believe there will be **more hybrid/virtual events in the future** and more, smaller local and regional events, versus large international events.

## Booking now or later?

According to our survey respondents, booking windows will:



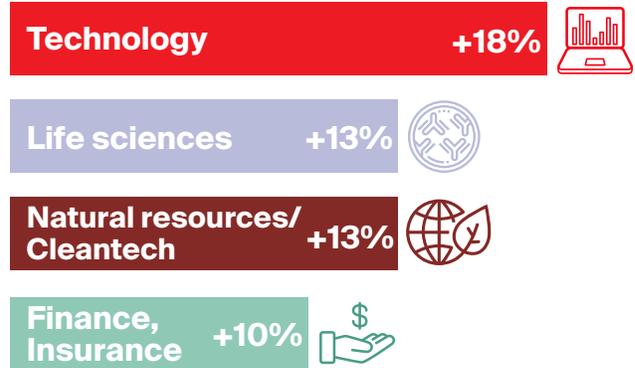
\*These numbers reflect collective response from all planners and may likely vary based on segment and size of meetings.



## Resilient sectors

Destination Canada also inquired about the evolution of events within Canada's priority sectors (life sciences, technology, natural resources, agribusiness, advanced manufacturing). Planners generally agreed that there will be a decrease or the same number of events within each sector.

Percentage of planners who predict an increase of events in the following priority sectors:



However, many noted decreases in meetings as well.

	Decreasing	Maintaining	Increasing
<b>Agribusiness</b>			
Count	↓20	19	↑1
Row%	50.0%	47.5%	2.5%
<b>Advanced Manufacturing/Aerospace</b>			
Count	↓22	15	↑3
Row%	55.0%	37.5%	7.5%
<b>Life Sciences</b>			
Count	↓18	17	↑5
Row%	45.0%	42.5%	12.5%
<b>Natural Resources/ CleanTech</b>			
Count	↓17	18	↑5
Row%	42.5%	45.0%	12.5%
<b>Technology</b>			
Count	↓22	11	↑7
Row%	55.0%	27.5%	17.5%
<b>Finance/ Insurance</b>			
Count	↓20	16	↑4
Row%	50.0%	40.0%	10.0%

## Planners' key considerations



The majority respondents commented that their preferences of destinations changed since COVID-19 (over 65%). **Safety has become an even stronger factor** (health and destination restrictions). **Organizations are looking at destinations which have managed the pandemic well** and which have **strong meeting safety protocols and enforcement in place**; there is **greater emphasis on destination infrastructure** and health risk associated with property style or destination. Many are currently “sitting on the sidelines” waiting for more information on what direction this is all going.

## Insights into the incentive segment – opportunities for Canada



When asked about who designs incentive travel components within their organizations, half of our respondents said they did it internally. Others said that their clients have their own programs already developed.

### RESEARCH RESOURCES FOR INCENTIVE EXPERIENCES AND DESTINATIONS



Many organizers still do their own proactive research over the Internet, which provides opportunities for DMOs and DMCs to capture some of that demand by proactively promoting their incentive product and soliciting for it directly with the organizers.

### REQUESTING PROPOSALS

Planners responding to our survey indicated the majority of RFP sourcing is handled by specialized third parties/agencies (33%) or local DMCs (15%), with some sourced to hotels directly or via global sales offices. Rarely do they involve DMOs into the RFP process. **All the respondents work with local DMCs (100%) at some point in the process.**

### THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF INCENTIVE TRAVEL

**44%** of respondents believe that their incentive programs will remain status quo.

**Over 52%** believe they will be smaller with other added incentives as rewards.

The majority of planners believe luxury, curated/bespoke activities and sustainable Corporate Social Responsibility focused activities will be most popular. Some see a trend of adding a meeting component to their incentive programs.



# Staying in touch

At the time of the survey more than one third of the event organizers were ready to hear from international destinations or neutral on the topic, and slightly under a third were not ready to hear from destinations at that time. We believe this has to do with the type or purpose of communication.

When asked what information they would be most interested in, the majority of planners are interested in receiving general destination information with updates on new developments, followed closely by safety guidelines and “delegate journey” as it relates to travelling safely to the destination. Sharing inspirational ideas of experiences and activities are also very welcome.

With regards to Canada specifically, planners are looking at Canada for knowledge and inspiration. As they view Canada as one of the desirable international destinations, they would like to learn what Canadian destinations are doing to ensure safe return of in-person events and how Canadian leadership and innovation in thriving sectors can help their organizations/membership to rebound.

Many are looking for inspiring ideas for incentive experiences to reward performance, build corporate culture and connect teams.

## Contact



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