FUTURE FORWARD 2025

CONVENING

CORENET GLOBAL
The Global Association for Corporate Real Estate
Envisioned Future of CONVENING

The following Future Forecasts were formulated, vetted and synthesized following input from hundreds of members across the globe who participated in this association-shaping thought leadership exercise.

By 2025, the personal connection and human experience of an event will be even more important to participants.

By 2025, participants will expect a fluid experience with digital-physical integration, but technology will not replace the need and desire for face-to-face events.

By 2025, CoreNet Global will create a universal event experience that removes language, time and distance barriers and fosters an open, international marketplace.

By 2025, CoreNet Global events will be designed with greater creativity, flexibility and the ad hoc ability to “convene on the fly.”

By 2025, participants will seek purpose and values-driven experiences through a trusted source that are authentic and exceptional.

Future Forecasts
CONVENING

CoreNet Global embarked on an 18-month initiative in 2017 to envision the association model of the future in four key areas: belonging, convening, learning, and information and content. Work groups met virtually and around the world to develop future forecasts that will inform the strategic direction of the organization for years to come. This is one of four reports also accompanied by an overarching document that includes an executive summary and a further explanation of the project.
Where are we meeting? This once simple question now has a much broader menu of possible options as existing and traditional models for convening are changing along with consumer expectations and innovative technologies ranging from apps and avatars to virtual reality. Members predict that CoreNet Global will continue to deliver high quality, professional events well into the future. But increasingly, these events will be presented in less traditional ways.

Convening will need to adapt to greater digital-physical integration, real-time solutions and changing expectations related to personal connection and human experience. Broadly speaking, there is a fundamental shift occurring within the meeting & event space as it relates to how, why and where people are choosing to convene, as well as what people expect from those gatherings. Gone are the days when people would simply attend an event and passively sit back and listen to the latest panel discussion or keynote speaker. People want and need an opportunity to “co-create” or actively participate, contribute and engage with others.

Similarly, a key theme that has been at the forefront for corporate real estate (CRE) professionals in recent years is how to cultivate a workplace experience that increases employee engagement. CoreNet Global is working to solve much the same issue relative to its own hosted meetings and conferences. The convening experience needs to embrace new modes of learning, improve personalization and create new opportunities for meaningful engagement, especially when it comes to attracting and retaining younger members.

The meeting & event profession, and organizations that put on large functions like CoreNet Global, are going through a fundamental shift, which is creating an opportunity to redesign the entire medium of convening. That’s why CoreNet Global seized the opportunity to gather its members and subject matter experts in work groups around the world to discuss the future of the association as it relates to convening, belonging, learning, and information and content – all areas intricately intertwined across the association. This initiative, FutureForward 2025, enabled members to help create a shared vision of the future. The report below seeks to explore the role that meetings and conferences will play in the association’s overall value proposition and forecast changes anticipated that will redefine what it means to convene in 2025 and beyond.

What types of meeting formats will resonate in 2025? It is clear that people are demanding a more interactive experience. CoreNet Global does have a vast knowledge base within its membership, according to work group participants, and there is a desire to tap into the knowledge of everyone in the room – virtually or in person. Some of the other drivers for change in the convening space include:

- Technology
- New ways of working
- Changing roles of members
- Globalization
- Changes in the way people socialize and learn
- New “consumerization” of expectations

The first step in reinventing convening is to truly understand the audience and how events can be designed to exceed expectations. A few convening themes resonated with the diverse work groups as follows:

- **Meaning**: Attendees want meaningful, useful conversations.
- **Relevance**: They expect more relevant engagement.
- **Personalization**: People desire the ability to personalize and customize how they interact and consume information.
- **Simplicity**: They want simple access. One participant noted: “I don’t want to spend time sorting through dozens of breakout session descriptions at a conference to figure out what I want. I want recommended content.”
- **Experience**: Information is everywhere. Experience is more valuable, and the desire for interesting experiences will drive participation and attendance.
- **Technology**: People expect a fluid, hybrid, digital-physical integration of events offered.
Success at a conference, in this case referring to a satisfying attendee experience, is defined uniquely by each individual delegate. And therein lies a key challenge for associations trying to customize and personalize engagement opportunities. How do you “wow” an audience one participant at a time, particularly when greater diversification of attendees is anticipated in the future?

The 2018 American Express Global Meetings and Events Forecast points to several event attendee profiles or personas that conference planners of the future will need to serve:

- **Knowledge seeker** – Primarily focused on engaging learning experiences
- **Tech-savvy networker** – Wants to build a contact list
- **Inspiration seeker** – Desires participation in a transformational experience
- **Social butterfly** – Seeks high profile, “see and be seen” opportunities
- **Reluctant attendee** – Feels obligated to attend but overwhelmed by event
- **Brand fanatic** – A dedicated follower buys into organization’s culture

With technological and demographic change afoot in an era where the customer is king, a consumerization of expectations has emerged, notes Mo Huseini, Senior Vice President, Design, Freeman Company, who worked closely with the FutureForward 2025 Convene work groups. Memorable experiences that members can share on Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook have to be part of the conference equation in order to compete for attendees’ time, loyalty and attention. Consumers are increasingly reliant on mobile devices that are simplifying their lives and making it easier to do everything from order a car service to a cup of coffee via their smart phones. They are accustomed to a high-tech, highly curated custom experience and that experience drives all of their expectations when attending meetings and events.

Events, in many respects, support the mission of an organization and are a platform for members to interact, learn from one another and disseminate information and content. As such, much of what is contained in this document mirrors, augments or aligns with other work group findings as part of the FutureForward 2025 project.

Each forecast was carefully crafted with thoughtful input, context, insights and research as noted in greater detail on the following pages.

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Future Forecasts

1 FUTURE FORECAST: By 2025, the personal connection and human experience of an event will be even more important to participants.

Automation and technology will steadily increase the relative value of certain human qualities in work, including social skills and creativity. In the age of artificial intelligence, humans will remain relevant not by knowing, but by thinking, listening, relating and collaborating at the highest level. Simply put, technology may in fact lead to a need for “more human humans.” This presents a vital opportunity for professional associations like CoreNet Global to facilitate more meaningful interactions to help members connect on matters that require discussion and thought leadership.

Add to this the growth anticipated in remote and gig work, and the demand for bringing people together will only increase, as noted more fully in the FutureForward 2025 Belonging work group report.

Personal Connections

Members will still be looking to CoreNet Global to provide relevant insights and education, but networking will become even more important in the future as people desire personal connections. A 2016 study by the International Association of Exhibitions and Events indicated that a survey of 9,000 conference participants, 76% indicated that the networking experience was the primary determinant in whether they go to a conference. This trend is expected to grow with greater emphasis on substantive networking with greater focus and purpose.

“There is a realization that CoreNet Global has a lot of value in terms of knowledge, especially when it comes to convening at Summits or large meetings,” one work group participant noted. “The added value of being part of the CoreNet Global network is linked to networking and seeing old friends that you maybe haven’t spoken to in a year, or to be able to use some of your peers as a sounding board for your own issues or your own challenges.”

Husseini agrees: “Many associations are exploring the problems surrounding networking, because networking is not just about meeting people. I don’t care about just meeting people, I care about meeting people who are relevant to me. That’s what attendees are saying.” People are accustomed to the “short cuts” they see on social media platforms, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, that offer suggestions to connect with people they might know or groups that might be of interest. “On most conference experiences today, people go to events and walk around looking for serendipity—hoping to maybe meet someone useful. There is a greater demand to make meaningful connections that can lead to useful conversations,” he adds.

2 FUTURE FORECAST: By 2025, participants will expect a fluid experience with digital-physical integration, but technology will not replace the need and desire for face-to-face events.

Technology is making everyone’s lives easier yet more complex with each year. People have access to an abundance of information at their fingertips. Professionals can easily access the latest white paper or TED talk on co-working trends, wellness programs or lease accounting solutions. They have a higher expectation that technology can be used to make their conference participation easier, whether that is signing in to an event or getting alerts and recommendations for relevant sessions and content. Another byproduct of technology is that because there is so much communication taking place digitally, when people are physically present, they are looking to forge more personal connections with industry peers as noted above.

Matchmaking

With this in mind, FutureForward 2025 work groups coalesced around the concept of professional matchmaking whereby the association could help “strategically” match attendees with other attendees of interest. This may include:

- Like-minded colleagues
- Attendees searching for solutions to a problem
- Conference goers with contrary thoughts or ideas
- Participants from another part of the world
- Members wanting collaboration on a project
- Delegates seeking business opportunities

Husseini recalled a recent experimental element at a conference that offered “brain dating” via a two-seat swing. Participants were paired with other delegates based upon what information and interests they had shared in their attendee profiles. The swings went up in the air for 5-10 minutes for this purposeful pairing. “It seemed whimsical and goofy, but it really worked really well,” he said.

Socialization for the sake of socialization will be more important by 2025 as well, some predicted. Current events are traditional with little facilitated social components. Many members are looking for events that also offer diverse experiences that are hip, high-energy and include non-CRE-specific areas such as technology, art or music. But members were quick to note that social engagement is not frivolous. Socialization is critical to achieve deeper networking between participants and it helps to promote greater work/life balance. The social element needs to be designed to foster a sense of camaraderie and community, and with the introduction of virtual participation, the social component of an event will become more important.

There will always be a desire for face-to-face interaction, members concur. However, technology has the ability to provide remote access and extend the value of an event. As corporate budgets continue to squeeze travel expenses and time becomes an ever more precious commodity, CoreNet Global could significantly differentiate itself by providing a full range of virtual and digital convening options that allow members to access events from anywhere with options ranging from live-streaming to on-the-go apps to dashboards and online social networking platforms that allow for online collaboration, sharing information and networking.

CoreNet Global should continue to look at opportunities to leverage technology to enhance the experience of in-person events, as well as use technology to connect its global membership to broaden both scope and participation, with tools such as video conferencing, virtual and augmented reality (VR and AR). Members will expect to see more experimentation with hybrid meetings & events in the future that combine both online and in-person meetings.

Attendees will also expect faster, better, free high-speed internet access, data security, apps, interactive technology and streaming support as an automatic part of their event experience.

According to a report by the International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE), 5G service speeds will be between three and five times faster than 4G capabilities and have the added benefit of being better able to penetrate walls – eliminating those “dead zones” that can occur in some buildings. What that means for meetings & events is that it will provide greater capability to support higher quality technology, such as VR programming, multi-person interactive video conferencing and other 3-D types of video communication. By 2025, even higher speeds and access will likely become the norm.

VR and AR are already moving more into the mainstream for consumers, as well as for associations who are using it to facilitate virtual meetings, information and education sessions and entertainment. The International Data Corp. forecasts that the market for VR and AR systems will grow from $9.1 billion in 2017 to $17.8 billion in 2018 with an annual compounded growth rate of nearly 100% that will push it to nearly $71.2 billion in 2020. IIAE also notes that the following 10 tech-related offerings are likely to become expected by conference goers in the next five years, requiring significantly more broadband capabilities:

1. Smartphone audience participation
2. Conference apps
3. Delegate email and internet access
4. Video streaming presentation content
5. Virtual attendees
6. Live event streaming
7. Online learning
8. Video streaming to delegate device
9. Beacon/GPS tracking of delegates
10. Augmented reality

**Enhanced Efficiency**

Technology is poised to play a much bigger role in convening by bringing more efficiencies to on-site events, as well as creating new opportunities for online and virtual meetings, events and collaboration. It will also help associations better customize and personalize the attendee experience.

Technology may deliver a “wow” factor at events, but the potential improvement in efficiencies will remove some of the pinch points of meetings and make things simpler, more enjoyable and more productive for all of the various conference stakeholders. This can include a seamless pre- and on-site registration process, selection of content and social options, and new ways to maximize the attendee experience, to name a few. Cost and affordable, scalable technologies will be factors of concern. Meeting planning professionals say there is a need to balance the “wow” with the essentials, noting that associations should ask themselves whether the investment will help achieve a meeting or strategic objective and what problems will the technology solve.

Many work group participants agreed, noting that CoreNet Global “should not chase technology for the sake of technology.” Others added that technology solutions “don’t need to be grandiose.” Even simple apps or use of technology will be effective in the future. Some added that hybrid meetings would enable CoreNet Global to get the most value from its technology budget by combining an interactive on-site experience with an online livestreaming event.

**New Ways of Working**

Changes occurring within the meetings & event space are following much the same path as the transformation occurring within the workplace that has been top of mind for CRE professionals. A more mobile, tech-enabled workforce is used to working from anywhere and at any time. That same concept of remote working can be applied to convening with tech-enabled meetings that can be accessed online or virtually.

The expectation for experience is being set not by what people are used to seeing at a traditional conference, rather it is being set by their digital lives. “In our digital lives, everything we do is experiential. Everything is curated for us as individuals. Everything that we do is bite-sized, and everything we do is interactive where we can engage with the content and offer feedback and have a voice,” one work group participant articulated.

For example, people used to have to try to remember to do things, like changing the air filter in their home or stopping at the store to buy dog food. Now, technology allows people to offload those chores. Rather than remembering to do it, and then physically going to the store to purchase that product, there’s an online subscription service where that filter or dog food routinely shows up at the door. People can set up an automatic order that is delivered to their door, which is unlike going to the store to purchase that product, there’s an online subscription service where that filter or dog food routinely shows up at the door.


up on the doorstep when it’s needed, notes Husseini. People are becoming accustomed to those convenient, easy and frictionless experiences. They can use an app to order a car service, groceries for delivery or even a cup of coffee. When they walk in the door at home, smart home technology, such as Nest and Echo, knows that they’ve arrived and can turn on the lights or adjust the temperature.

It used to be that the best technology people had was at their place of employment. Computers and software were usually better and more powerful at work than at home. Those days are gone: “People have gotten used to having access to very polished, very frictionless, very easy-to-use interfaces around every aspect of their lives and that tends to fall apart when they engage with the commercial world,” says Husseini. Convening can take note of the disruption that is occurring in the retail sector. Retailers are figuring out that people can buy commodity goods online. They need a reason to come to the store, whether it is for the service, experience, entertainment, or a hard-to-find item. Some retailers have “cracked the code” in modern retail by really focusing on the customer and customer’s needs. But not everyone is so lucky—many retailers are closing doors and stores.

People who walk into a retail store and have a frustrating experience – not finding what they want, not getting help from a knowledgeable sales person, not being able to quickly get through a checkout line – often walk out and might never go back. Those same risks related to customer annoyances and frustrations exist in the convening space where information has become the commodity. Attendees are fully engaged in the digital world. They are comfortable conducting all sorts of transactions online from their smart phone or mobile device, and yet when they come to an event they have to line up to sign in and collect an ID badge. “Many associations aren’t addressing that experience and they’re not engaging with people in a way that is adding value,” says Husseini.

“Many associations are doing what they were doing 20 years ago,” he said. “CoreNet Global is way ahead in this regard.” He cautioned, however, that it will be important for CoreNet Global to adapt to the transformation occurring within the convening space where people are placing greater value on digital-physical integration and real-time solutions.

CoreNet Global is already incorporating more technology into its meetings and events. For example, the association is now using technology to capture Global Summit content, such as break-out sessions. In the past, only the Power Point presentations were available after the fact in the Knowledge Center. Now, through technology, the presentations also have the speaker voiceover included so more content is available after the live event. Other recent innovations include:

- A podcast channel with a podcast parlor featured at each Global Summit where attendees can record content of potential interest to their peers
- Learning theaters where content is integrated into an exhibit hall experience
- CNGtv, a new video offering that launched at the 2018 Global Summit in Boston

“Technology is still new enough in our human experience that it is very visible and noticeable,” a work group participant pointed out. Similar to when cars arrived to replace horse-drawn carriages, those vehicles and the efficiencies they brought drew a lot of attention. Eventually, people took cars for granted. Over time, technology will become more and more invisible and more innate in how we operate and how we work together. And it is inevitable that technology will play a bigger role in helping to facilitate convening.

**High-tech Expectations**

Many CRE professionals do have high expectations for the possibility of technology to enable a more fluid, hybrid, virtual-physical interaction at events in the future. Some suggestions for CoreNet Global include:

- Create a technology platform that allows participants to find others based on interest or problem and allow them to come together for creative problem solving (supports matchmaking concept above).
- Provide access to wearable devices, holograms and avatars, to allow people to participate remotely in the future (imagine sending your avatar to a meeting to network and learn best practices).
- Enhance content capturing abilities at events so that the CoreNet Global community can record, store and distribute the created content for later use.
- Use AI and machine learning to aid in scheduling of on-demand events and sessions.
- Gain a better understanding of attendee behavior through big data and analytics through AI deep learning pattern recognition.
- Transform the exhibit hall experience into a technology playground using tools like VR and AR.
Further, members are becoming even more comfortable with various modes of accessing content in their daily lives, such as Roku, Echo, TED talks, YouTube and streaming movies and podcasts from their televisions, computers or mobile devices. Online virtual reality products are now readily available and price competitive. Members will increasingly expect these kinds of capabilities to be available in the organizations with whom they associate to integrate with the way they work. The technologies to enable these modes of engagement will make these experiences more effective and better serve members’ needs for when, where and how they want to receive it in the future.

Safety & Security

Technological advancement brings with it a growing concern about data integrity, privacy and security. As more and more amounts of data are collected in association with event attendees, the risks will only increase in the years ahead. How much information will members be willing to share? How confident will they be in an association’s ability to keep it secure? As with all other companies doing business in a digital, global economy, CoreNet Global will need to make thoughtful, careful decisions related to protecting data privacy.

In contrast, technology can also be leveraged to heighten physical security in other ways. Live, in-person events, for example, pose a number of safety risks in the event of natural disasters or human-initiated incidents such as terrorist acts or civil unrest. Some experts note that associations could leverage drones, for example, to record activity at an event for additional security and situational awareness.6

With an increase in globalization expected (in spite of a recent rise in nationalism), there are a number of growing security risks that will require association attention in the years ahead, IAEE reports. Visa waivers, borders, freedom of movement, international freight inspections and international visitors traveling into other countries are areas with changing laws and restrictions that could impact the event logistics and the attendee experience. Partnering with country, state and local government agencies to ensure crisis and contingency plans are in place may become increasingly important over time.8

3 FUTURE FORECAST: By 2025, CoreNet Global will create a universal event experience that removes language, time and distance barriers and fosters an open, international marketplace.

CoreNet Global will continue to put the “global” in its event offerings in the years ahead, work groups predict, but will do so in new and creative ways. The globalization of business operations and CRE footprints is fostering a bigger desire among CRE professionals to connect with people outside of their local markets, as well as internationally. The issues that CRE teams are dealing with in Brazil may be very similar to that of China or Madrid but the cultural nuances and local business practices may be quite unique. So, why not share experiences, ideas and resources?

At the same time, people are more mobile in their own careers with jobs that now take them all over the world for business travel or job opportunities, and they are seeking knowledge and personal connections outside of their home countries, many note.

Going Local in a Global World

Yet many will also value that local, chapter experience that allows members to connect in smaller groups, they say. Smaller events can help to take a hyper-focus on a specific topic or customize to a very local perspective. It also provides an opportunity for members to develop leadership skills within their local chapter organization, even if they’re not yet in a leadership role in their jobs.

The 2018 American Express Global Meetings & Events Forecast points to an increased trend toward conference localization, recognizing country-specific needs, for example. The report notes that there will be a strong need for overarching global programming but with a local customization element that enhances value. Work group members predict that there will be increased cross-pollination globally and locally between chapters, allowing for sharing of content, meeting and participating.5

People are accustomed to more and more conveniences at their fingertips. They can sit at their desk in New York or London and order food to be delivered or an Uber to take them home, or have a quick chat with a colleague in Singapore via Skype. “Technology is linking all of this interactivity together,” one member noted, “but I also think local is the new global. That holds true for a lot of things and really building that strong local community can help strengthen the ties of an organization. Starting with that strong local base also builds momentum when adding on regional, national and international connections.”

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As noted above, technology can be used to scale content delivery around the world. Local contextualization and facilitated discussions could be a significant value add when livestreaming an event, for example.

Virtual meetings can be a solution to increase convening opportunities in regions where in-person participation is a significant obstacle. For example, Africa is a vast region where travel is still very time-consuming and cumbersome. Still, there continue to be challenges related to the reliability of that videoconferencing technology, for example, because there are different bandwidth capabilities in different locales.

Event organizers “must embrace diversity of thought and culture and consider the experience of remote delegates in foreign geographies,” according to Adam Lanteigne, Senior Product Marketing Manager from the Surface division at Microsoft. “This will inevitably improve the mobility experience as companies move rapidly to more secure, cloud-based infrastructures. Cloud-based technologies will connect an ecosystem of people through devices that make sharing creative ideas an expectation rather than a hindrance.”

Kaleidoscope Meetings

The notion of kaleidoscope gatherings was explored at length at FutureForward 2025 work group sessions around the world. There was consensus that diversity needs to be substantially reflected in event planning – accommodating different generations, learning styles, cultural perspectives and physical abilities. Attendees will expect events to cater to individual preferences, but also will benefit from engaging and supporting differences with a globally diverse audience.

Celebrating diverse voices, whether at in-person or virtual events, will be necessary to provide fresh perspectives and creative thinking, according to event blogger Sheryl Connelly. Contrarian ideas can challenge audiences to think more broadly. This will be vital in the years ahead, members concur.

Looking to the future, CoreNet Global has the opportunity to explore a variety of options to connect members globally:

- Creating global special interest groups that are continuously connected virtually
- Creating global conferences where virtual groups have an opportunity to participate and meet face-to-face
- Focusing more content on global issues, trends and emerging best practices, while comparing and contrasting local market-to-market differences and implications
- Providing real-time translation of content into multiple languages that will be game changing for greater global inclusion and interaction

Socializing Reshaped

Across the globe, social media, telecommuting, digital entertainment and shifting social norms are reshaping patterns of convening both online and in person. A growing percentage of social interaction is now digitally mediated. This means the need to change one’s physical location to convene with others is declining. For CoreNet Global, that means it has the opportunity to engage members anytime and anywhere across geographies by building stronger professional networks and special interest or affinity groups in the future. The subject matter of an affinity group could be narrow or broad, local or global, tactical or strategic, present day or futuristic. Those groups could help membership convene more frequently as they collaborate, share ideas, troubleshoot or have conversations on topics that are relevant to a particular situation.

4 FUTURE FORECAST: By 2025, CoreNet Global events will be designed with greater creativity, flexibility and the ad hoc ability to “convene on the fly.”

As CoreNet Global adapts to the future of convening it is important to recognize that people are comfortable with different modalities of learning and content consumption. Different ways of learning are not necessarily due to generational differences. There have been numerous studies over the past few decades that have explored a myriad of different ways that people learn in schools and the workplace and across geographies. For example, some people work better in groups as they thrive on that social component, while others are more productive working independently. Other studies break down learning into three basic categories: visual learners, auditory learners and kinesthetic learners or those that absorb more with a hands-on experience.

The main takeaway from this is that there is no one-size-fits-all solution, which is why it is important to create flexible models and options for convening. “As event organizers, we have to learn to create ways for people to connect and engage in ways that they are comfortable. You can’t force everybody to go to a computerized webinar where they are clicking through on different options to get a certification,” says Husseini. Event learning opportunities will be need be less prescriptive and more collaborative in their development and execution by the year 2025.

Alternative Space Options

In a word, flexibility will be key for CoreNet Global event offerings moving forward. However, this can pose many challenges for an association, particularly for large in-person events where traditional meeting space offerings and configurations can be limiting – and financial obligations can be significant. That’s why work groups suggest the utilization of alternative spaces to convene.
A 2016 IAEE survey points to the following top five meeting venue elements that will be desired and required in the next five years:\(^{12}\)

1. Access to interactive technology
2. Flexibility of meeting space
3. Networking spaces adjacent to the meeting/event
4. Ability for delegates to discover the locality and regional culture
5. Memorable food and beverage offerings (Goodbye rubber chicken!)

CRE professionals are more focused on creating a workplace that improves employee retention, productivity and engagement. Clearly, there are many parallels that can be applied to the convening space. CoreNet Global recognizes that meeting & event venues that are interesting and dynamic – especially as members are more conscious of where they are spending those meeting and event dollars – will become increasingly important.

And just as the competition for talent has changed the focus and purpose of corporate real estate, it also is changing the convening space. The new generation of talent is evaluating compensation and career choice not only based on cash compensation and benefits, but also on quality of life at work. Any employer who wants to retain and attract top talent is having to create a more inviting workspace with more services and an amenity-rich environment. Employers have raised the bar on workplace standards, and those higher expectations are spilling over into other areas of one’s work life, including meetings and events.

The physical meeting space does impact the perception of a person’s overall experience. One simple research study gave people a taste test of ordinary tap water. People who drank the water out of a martini glass rated it as better tasting, notes Husseini. “The reality is that everything that we do is based on all five of our senses,” he says. “That is why it is important for groups to think holistically about design, the purpose of space and the experience that people are having in the space.”

Memorable Space, Quality Time

Husseini encourages associations to design experiences with space and time in mind. In other words, space can help make a memorable experience. If that memorable experience is one of many memories left after an event, then an attendee will believe it was time well spent and is more likely to attend again. The goal is to envision and create a more holistic event experience. And space can be a vital part of that.

That’s why members encourage event exploration beyond the four walls of a typical convention center or meeting venue. While recognizing that an association will likely always have budget constraints and specific space needs to accommodate group size, members encouraged CoreNet Global to explore new and alternative venues ranging from parks and museums to malls and manufacturing plants. This would also help show the diversity of asset types that CRE professionals serve, some said.

“Too often, we’re forced to rely on conventional venues – windowless conference rooms or commercial spaces that feel soulless,” says event producer Brendan Doherty. “And yet our cities teem with original, dynamic venues hidden from the planner’s eye. The circular and share economies can offer us new venue opportunities. Some startups are using our peer-to-peer economy to open up unconventional, more personalized spaces – like urban lofts or family vineyards – while others are repurposing under-utilized commercial space into innovative conference centers with natural light, better space flow, and healthy foods.”

Doherty also notes that associations, as suggested by members above, should help attendees better connect to nature. “When you ask a room of 100 people to picture where they’re most at peace, 90% pictures somewhere outside and near the water,” he suggests. “Biophilic event design can leverage these tendencies to design experiences that elicit desirable guest reactions – like creativity, focus, collaboration, or relaxation.”\(^{13}\)

Delivering an Immersive and Participatory Experience

CoreNet Global is already recognizing a need to move from a model where event attendees sit and listen to more dynamic problem-solving and social engagement in the event’s learning activities. Attendees want to participate and there is a recognition of the value to be gained by tapping into the knowledge that exists more broadly within the group or network using a crowdsourcing model. Passive learning at events will be replaced with opportunities to co-create and learn with one another, tackling strategic problems and producing real-time solutions together.

Members noted that fostering more engagement and participation in the future doesn’t necessarily involve making a seismic shift. There can be very simple ways to engage the audience in discussion, such as:

- Using mobile phones or tablets to ask real-time polling questions, deliver instant gratification
- Introducing tech demonstrations within presentations where the audience can see and experience the technology that presenters are discussing
- Hosting a presentation of a case study on location where participants can see the results or the problem that a group is working to solve

People will get a lot more out of the hands-on learning and getting a peek into what their peers are doing, many proposed. They want more opportunities to engage, which means providing content that is both informative and generative. People can still attend that panel discussion or speaker, but it is important to allow the


voices in that room (or participating virtually) to reverberate back and share content or their own experiences.

The power there is having that insight to curate and form where the conversation goes. In the past, people who showed up for a session that turned out to be not what they expected could get up and leave or log out. So there will be a powerful effect if there is a way for a speaker or panel to interact more deliberately in the future with the audience and have some of the conversations be guided by what the audience wants to talk about as opposed to what the speaker or the panel wants to talk about.

Now when a speaker is up on the stage, he or she is competing against the entire internet and all of the information and experience and engagement that fits inside of every person’s pocket. “The second that your content is less interesting than whatever else you can find in the world, you’re probably going to lose a lot of people,” one participant surmised.

Why Experiential Convening will Matter

Bringing people together to talk, network and share ideas and opinions is, for many, a fundamental reason why people convene. “I fundamentally believe that the need to convene... to come together... is a deeply felt human need. We want and need to see more of each other, engage with each other and better understand each other,” says Husseini. However, there is a shift in why people are convening and choosing to come to that chapter meeting or that big industry conference. “The old model was that if you wanted to hear the latest and greatest thinking about your profession, you better come to our conference, because that’s the only way you’re going to hear it,” he says.

This doesn’t exist anymore. People now live in a fluid world of information. People are tweeting and talking about a topic on social media during and after an event. Within two to three days of any conference, there are often white papers or a power point presentation available to download or even a link to the recording. It’s great that information is reaching a broader audience, but it also means that people don’t have to come to a conference. Associations will struggle with the financial model that will enable and support this kind of content access in the future.

And when prospective attendees are deciding whether to attend a face-to-face meeting, especially one that requires multiple days out of the office and away from family, the event will need to be compelling and flexible enough to allow participation on individual terms. “Information is ubiquitous,” one participant commented. “What is more difficult to obtain online is the experiential element that will be increasingly prized.”

For example, people will still want to see, hear and touch the latest and greatest innovations in an exhibit hall, work group members predict. The same would be true for smaller hands-on events as noted above.

What would an ideal conference/convention model look like? Some members pointed to the South by Southwest (SXSW) event – a popular annual film, music and interactive media festival held each year in Austin, Texas that attracts more than 75,000 registrants and thousands more who attend a variety of free events associated with the conference including live concerts, films and interactive exhibits of the latest digital technology. Calling itself a “premier destination for discovery,” the event allows for pop-up meetings and discussions as interest and conversations evolve. For a large event with many moving piece and parts, it is an example referenced as one that epitomizes flexibility and “on the fly” experiences.

Some options for CoreNet Global to consider in the future include:

- Creating more opportunities to attend events around a laser-focused topic.
- Establishing strategic partnerships to enable collaboration within specific sectors, such as life sciences, higher education or green energy.
- Create targeted networks that push meeting topics out based on detailed profiles provided by the member as it relates to experience, job profile and areas of interest.
- Create an open source platform that allows for teams of participants to come together virtually for creative problem solving. This platform could include both members and non-members, as well as people working within and outside of CRE.
- Tailor meeting topics and events to different levels of membership that resonate with different seniority levels and different roles within an organization. This has the potential to remain relevant to current members, as well as attract new members.
- Deliver bite-size content. Meetings and events will increasingly need to weave in those shorter, rapid-fire sessions on specific topics, trends or skills. Education is becoming obsolete faster than it ever has before as the pace of change accelerates. Therefore, the requirement for bite-size teaching and learning at conferences in a post-graduate scenario is more important than ever before.
Future Forecast: By 2025, participants will seek purpose and values-driven experiences through a trusted source that are authentic and exceptional.

Increasingly, attendees will want a deeper, richer experience that is infused with excitement, passion, fun, authenticity, self-expression and a sense of a broader purpose, prompting a re-casting of the traditional conference agenda and content approach. This rise of the conscious consumer is playing out for companies the world over, and CoreNet Global will need to take note in order to remain compelling and relevant.

Meaning Matters

The 2017 research report “Translating the Neuroscience of Behavioural Economics into Employee Engagement” by the Incentive Research Foundation points to how most human decision-making is emotional, not rational. This identifies the need for greater emotional connection with content and networking experiences offered at conferences so that attendees can achieve their personal development goals.14

“When it comes to events, we should measure what matters with our environmental, social, and community impact,” according to Doherty. “We call this an event’s Living Data. Everything from carbon footprints to waste diversion rates to the social impact that comes from hiring more minority owned businesses. Why does it matter? Living Data adds depth and purpose to our client’s story. And it connects us to people right where it matters the most – their values and emotions.”15

“What matters” will become increasingly important in the years ahead as Millennials focus more than prior generations on higher purpose and deeper meaning in how they spend their time, numerous studies show. This topic is addressed further in other Future Forward 2025 work group reports.

Convening work groups aligned with meeting planning professionals’ forecasts about purpose-driven events and noted the following areas of importance for the future:

1. Thoughtful sustainability – While going green is nothing new for members or events, there will likely be a heightened emphasis on this with each passing year. Conferences will be expected to recycle, reuse and repurpose in every way possible. Increasingly, attendees will notice and appreciate when greater care is given to the use of biodegradable products, for example, with items such as name badges or paperless events leveraging apps and digital signage. Members also encourage using venues that will donate surplus goods to charitable organizations or senior living centers.

Offering virtual participation opportunities also contributes to a reduction in attendees’ carbon footprint, something that member companies have already begun to embrace.

2. Foodie food – As noted above, members hope the days of mediocre meals will be left behind by the year 2025 and that associations will be able to create food experiences with locally sourced offerings and healthy menus. Gone will be the days of breaking the diet while at an event, according to the aforementioned AMEX report. Conference goers will demand organic, free-range, culturally diverse options to satisfy varying dietary preferences. Creativity in meal experiences and trendy options were also encouraged. One member suggested that instead of meeting to have a glass of wine, perhaps attendees could network while cooking a healthy meal together.

3. Wellness – Healthy food options go hand in hand with overall wellness, including physical fitness. Just as CRE professionals are addressing this in the workplace, meeting planners are working wellness into multiple aspects of in-person experiences.

Some members expressed excitement over the prospect of spin cycle classes or yoga during in-person events but they could also be accomplished virtually as well. These types of offerings could provide a dynamic break from the usual panel discussion or keynote speaker. They would also create an opportunity to pair those experiences with relevant content programming, such as an informational session on wellness.

People often travel long distances to attend a conference. They don’t just want to see only the hotel and conference center for three days, one member noted. Another indicated that the 5k run offered by CoreNet Global at current Global Summits was the best part of the event experience because “it allows you to explore a city on your feet and also connect with other CoreNet Global members who like to run. That is a cool experience, not necessarily a learning or teaching moment, but something that is fun to do.”


4. **Mindfulness** – “Packing several sessions to attend, booths to visit, notes to take and people to meet into two or three days can be quite demanding for conference attendees” Connelly says. “And while the goal is ensuring attendee minds are full, don’t discount the benefits of attendees being mindful as well. Leading experts agree that ‘brain breaks’ are crucial to rejuvenating the mind and actually foster elevated levels of creativity.” The lesson: Give attendees time and space to breathe, reflect, and regroup with hands-on workshops, outdoor activities, art exhibits or wellness activities, for example.

Overall, the Convening work groups cautioned that the association should not go too far chasing the “wow” and “fun factor” when it doesn’t have real purpose or meaning. And that the purpose can’t stray too far away from the association’s defined vision and mission. The goal, participants noted, is to be thoughtful in breaking from traditional meeting models, not just “throwing stuff at people to see what sticks.”

**Conclusion**

CoreNet Global will need to address the future of belonging, learning, and information and content in concert with its convening strategies moving forward. The key themes at the center of that discussion on convening will include digital-physical integration, personal connection and human experience, co-creation of content and providing real-time solutions.

And looking ahead, the FutureForward 2025 work group participants concurred that members and attendees will want to convene to address what is happening now and next, not just discuss what happened in the past.

“Conferences that are like time capsules promote and preserve nostalgia and the past,” according to Jeff Hurt, EVP, Education and Engagement with Velvet Chainsaw, a conference consulting company. “Conferences that are like time machines teleport people to the future so they can discover what’s next.”

“Conferences that resemble time capsules defend the status quo and traditions. Events that are like time machines invest in preparing their audience for what’s coming around the corner. Ultimately, our conferences should be where the present and future collide for the benefit of our customers!”

The same holds true for events large and small, face-to-face or virtual, global or local. The opportunities to convene will be many. The challenges for CoreNet Global will lie in identifying what will resonate most with audiences, how to optimize delivery – and generate the most participant value in the future.

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