

13 Evaluation in Different Types of Planned Events

Learning objectives

- Understand that different types of events present their own unique evaluation challenges.
- Be able to determine the motives, decision criteria, expectations, and satisfaction of attendees at business events
- Be able to measure return on investment, return on objectives, return on experience and conversion rates
- Be aware of special evaluation issues and challenges regarding festivals and cultural celebrations
- Understand methods for judging artistic quality
- Know the motivational and behavioural differences between sport participants and spectators, and what this means for evaluation

13.1 Introduction

Each type of planned event offers different experiences, often in special-purpose venues, and therefore presents unique challenges for the evaluator. Events have different *forms* (i.e., what they look like, their inherent characteristics) and functions (i.e., what they are intended to do, their goals and impacts). Every event is unique in some way, related to the combination of programme, setting, people, and management.

In this chapter three major categories of planned event are examined, namely business events, festivals and cultural celebrations (including special attention to the arts), and sport.

13.2 Business events

Figure 13.1 is a starting point for looking at different types of business event and related evaluation challenges. Charity events and private functions are included here for convenience.

Figure 13.1: Business events, private functions, and key evaluation challenges

	Some key evaluation challenges
<p><i>Business events</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Meetings, Conventions, Congresses ■ Fairs, Exhibitions (Trade and Consumer shows) ■ Corporate Events ■ Fund Raisers (charity) ■ Educational & Scientific 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Determining the motivations for attending when it is optional ■ What criteria and process should be employed to find the best location and venue? ■ Evaluating the experience from different perspectives ■ What is the quantifiable ROI? For corporations and associations, suppliers and exhibitors, and attendees; how do cities gain real value from investing in venues, marketing and bidding? ■ Operationalising return on experience and return on objectives ■ What are the ethical issues in fund-raising? ■ Can 'live event' or 'experiential' marketing be fun? Is it intrusive? ■ What is the source of competitive advantage in these markets?
<p><i>Private functions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Rites of passage (e.g., birthdays, Bar Mitzvahs) ■ Parties ■ Reunions ■ Weddings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Details of service quality can be of paramount importance in satisfying clients ■ Is the client always right? When do professionals put ethics and standards above client satisfaction?

13.2.1 Meetings, conventions and congresses

Meetings are one of the most common forms of planned events. They are found in just about every business and organisation. They range from small ones that people have to attend, and are often routine in the office, to major international congresses. Professional meeting planners aim to make them useful, cost and time-effective for clients, and more attractive, memorable, and satisfying to attendees. For the evaluator a necessary starting point is with the standards, advice, and education offered to members of professional associations.

The evaluator should have comprehensive knowledge of meeting planning and operations. In the book *The Business and Management of Conventions* (McCabe et al., 2000) major concerns are discussed: the business environment; stakeholders; supply; bidding; human resources; site and venue selection and design; housing; marketing; operations; quality management and evaluation; finances; legal and ethics. More recent books stress social media and technology. When in doubt, start with established specifications or standards.

Specifications

The Convention Industry Council produces the *APEX Event Specifications Guide Template* (www.conventionindustry.org) and this is a useful starting point for evaluators. Checklists are provided, making compliance or fulfilment the main evaluation task.

This is a four-part document:

“Part I: The Narrative – general overview of the event.

Part II: Function Schedule – timetable outlining all functions that compose the event.

Part IIIa: Function Set-up Order – specifications for each function that is part of the overall event (each function of the event will have its own Function Set-up Order).

Part IIIb: Function Set-up Order (Exhibitor Version) – specifications for each booth/stand that is part of an exhibition”

Motivation to attend; decision factors

Understanding why people travel to corporate and association meetings and conventions, and their decision-making process, are major topics in the literature. Meeting and exhibition planners want to optimize attendance, with purpose and venue capacity in mind, and this means attracting specific target segments. Several associations combined to conduct the ‘Decision to Attend Study for Conventions and Exhibitions’ (The Experience Institute, 2017) with a major finding being that attendees are ever-more discerning travellers motivated by education (95% of respondents), the destination (78%) and networking (76%). About half either want to extend their stay or bring someone with them on event trips – logically, meeting and exhibition planners need to partner with destination marketing organisations! As always, cost and time constraints remain the main barriers.

Return on Investment, Objectives and Experiences (ROI, ROO and ROE)

Effectiveness can refer to something simple like attracting a financially viable number of attendees, or knowledge retention on the part of participants – it is largely context-specific. Three measures (ROI, ROO, ROE) are being used, although return on investment is the dominant term. ROI might be important to a company wanting to motivate its employees and increase their commitment, innovation or productivity, in which case they want to know the impacts on profitability or some other metric linked to competitiveness.

ROO (Return on Objectives - or goals) does not necessarily require monetary measures, it can include satisfaction, self-reported learning outcomes, attendance growth, etc. Evaluators have to follow a logic model to determine if goals are met, and also if they are appropriate.

ROE (Return on Experience) is the most challenging evaluation task of the three. ROE recognizes that experiences are co-created and so the organisers are providing a ‘service proposition’ that the attendee might or might not buy into. Meetings and conventions that add experiential components outside the venue are trying to make the overall experience more unique and memorable with the intent of increasing satisfaction, loyalty, positive word of mouth and, ultimately effectiveness from the point of view of whoever is paying.