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**Research Guidelines  
for  
Meeting and Convention Spending Studies**

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# Research Guidelines for Meeting and Convention Spending Studies

## Introduction

Meetings and conventions are a significant component of the travel and tourism industry. The economic benefits to a destination can be extensive and widespread – extending far beyond the traditional definition of tourism industry businesses (e.g., hotels, restaurants, transportation providers).

Accordingly, considerable resources are often expended by the industry and the destination at large to maintain and nurture this economic driver. Sales and marketing dollars, product development including new and expanded convention centers, and infrastructure enhancements can be substantial.

In return, the industry and its stakeholders (i.e., funding sources, elected officials, the media, etc.) are expected to be able to articulate and report on the economic importance of the meetings and conventions market, the return on investment of the work of the DMO and its partners and often, on a more specific level, the value of a destination’s convention center as a generator of economic benefits.

The need for enhanced research to accurately estimate the direct spending by delegates, event organizers, and exhibiting companies at meetings and conventions was most recently articulated in *Best Practices: Convention Center Sales and Convention Center Operations*, a report published by the Joint Study Committee of DMAI and the International Association of Assembly Managers (IAAM) in August 2007:

*“The DMO-Convention Center partnership, seeking best practices in marketing and operations, should pursue opportunities to publically support the mission of the counterpart and defend the joint program that offers economic vitality to the municipality it serves.*

1. *Conduct ongoing research through credible third parties to substantiate the full economic impacts of the overall convention enterprise. Establish an understanding of the historical contribution to the area’s economic base including employment, state and local tax generation and employment data. Use these data as the basis of a public and community relations program that substantiates the value and importance of the industry on the local economy.*
2. *Develop a model that defines transient economic productivity and compares the convention and visitor enterprise with other economic generators within the local economy.”*

DMAI’s *Standard DMO Performance Reporting: A Handbook for DMOs* also calls for enhanced meetings and convention industry research so DMOs can measure the performance of their Convention Sales function and produce DMO-level return on investment calculations.

The following research guidelines have been developed by the Destination & Travel Foundation (formerly DMAI Foundation) to assist interested parties in developing a profile of a destination’s and/or its convention center’s meetings and conventions industry including its direct contributions to the economy. With minor modifications, they are also applicable for a single event if the need arises.

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The Destination & Travel Foundation’s Research Committee served as a study group for the development of these research guidelines. Ruth Trojan of Nadler & Associates (the Foundation’s research consultant) provided technical and research expertise. The Research Committee members included:

- Karen Williams, Greater Louisville CVB, co-chair
- Timothy Schneider, Schneider Publishing Company, co-chair
- Roy Benear, Austin CVB
- Robert Canton, PricewaterhouseCoopers
- Richard Green, Marriott International
- Steve Moore, Greater Phoenix CVB
- Stephen Powell, Destination Services
- Loretta Shafer, Beaches of South Walton TDC
- Richard Scharf, Denver Metro CVB

### **Research Guidelines**

The research guidelines contained in this document fall into three categories: administrative/operational considerations, research methodology recommendations and sample questions.

#### **Administrative/Operational Considerations**

It is strongly recommended that a reputable organization with experience in survey techniques be engaged. This can include market research companies, universities with a proven track record of producing research studies, or consultants who specialize in projects requiring a research component. Given that market research is subject to privacy laws that vary nation by nation, it is important that the selected research vendor be fully versed and have had experience conducting research in that country.

Many DMOs do not have the research staff or resources to conduct comprehensive research studies themselves. In addition, using a research organization will greatly reduce the risk of biases being introduced into the survey process including sampling bias, interviewing bias, non-participation bias, and questionnaire bias.

If more than one entity is involved (e.g., DMO, convention center, key hotels), create a task force with members from all of the entities and other interested parties such as local, state and/or regional stakeholders. A further advantage of a task force is that it creates “ambassadors” who can extend the DMO’s ability to communicate, justify, and incorporate the results of the research study.

Organizations that are undertaking research studies (such as DMOs and convention centers) are encouraged to thoroughly discuss their market information needs before the questionnaire is designed, including decisions on how the results are going to be used. Results used for major decisions will require a higher level of confidence which may involve a larger number of respondents and greater statistical reliability.

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Typically, market information needs include but are not limited to:

- Size and scope of the industry and its economic value to the community
- Who is coming to the destination for meetings and conventions
- Travel behavior
- Products and services used while in the destination

It is essential that all interested parties buy into the research study BEFORE it is conducted. This will greatly reduce the chance that the results will be challenged or rejected because someone's needs were not addressed, concerns not heard or the like.

Competitive bidding is strongly recommended to ensure an experienced and credible researcher is selected. A Request for Proposal (RFP) should be written, outlining the research needs and objectives, but not necessarily detailing the methodological approach, as allowing the bidders to present their own approach can be a useful method to eliminate unqualified respondents. The RFP should encourage bidders to recommend an approach that ensures the results are easily applied and relevant to the destination (i.e., no cookie-cutter solutions).

It should be noted that if the goal of the study is to estimate the economic impact of the meetings and conventions industry, the RFP should more broadly identify this as the research need/objective and the bidding teams may involve a combination of researchers, universities and/or economists/consultants.

#### Research Methodology Recommendations

There are many research methodologies available. Two of the more common ones are:

Intercepts – Surveying is conducted onsite, ideally in the highest traffic areas. The questionnaire may be administered by interviewers approaching potential respondents or at kiosks/tables. Public spaces are commonly used unless the facility and the event organizer agree to allow intercepts in event-specific areas such as the exhibit hall. Given respondents' time constraints, questionnaire should be kept as short as possible and can serve as gaining opt-in and email addresses for a post-event questionnaire.

Post-event – Surveying is conducted after the event. The questionnaire may be administered over the telephone, via email or online.

The appropriate methodology or methodologies will be a function of the study's objectives, the available budget and any other special considerations.

To ensure a representative sample of events is included, the following steps should be taken:

- Survey events throughout the year so the destination's seasonality is incorporated.
- Include the widest variety of events. Criteria should include meetings/conventions/tradeshows; market segments; size; association/corporate events; event scope (local, state, regional, national, international), location (hotel, convention center, meeting spaces). Event organizers should be informed ahead of time that their event has been selected for surveying.

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Response Counts - To ensure the final overall sample is representative of the entire pool of events, a statistically reliable sample (one that will produce results with a high confidence level and a low margin of error) is necessary for each individual event. Statistically reliable samples should be secured separately for delegates, exhibitors and meeting planners/organizers.

Key points about questionnaire design:

- Keep the questionnaire as short as possible. Completing the questionnaire should take no more than 10-15 minutes. If the questionnaire is running long, include the most critical questions early on, in case the respondent decides not to complete the questionnaire (a phenomenon known as “respondent fatigue”).
- Be prepared to offer an incentive for completing the questionnaire, especially if it is long and/or complicated. Incentives can include a promotional item, a certificate to be exchanged for food/beverage, a sweepstakes with more significant offerings, etc. The incentive should be appropriate and meaningful to the potential respondent.
- Pretest the questionnaire to ensure the questions are understandable and the questionnaire easy to complete. Early, interim results should be reviewed to identify any anomalies and insure that the data is “good.”

If the research results are going to be used for ongoing purposes, such as producing average spending figures, trend analyses, economic impact studies, no more than four years should elapse between studies.

The study results should be presented to the stakeholders, and the results interpreted in a manner that the lay person can understand. The results should also include a clear and thorough explanation of the methodologies used and how the results can and cannot be used.

### **Sample Questions**

Surveying meetings and conventions afford DMOs and their industry partners an invaluable opportunity to gather a wide variety of actionable information from this market segment. In addition to local spending questions, sections on trip behavior, demographics and product satisfaction can be added. The results from these sections of the questionnaire can be used to enhance and/or reposition sales and marketing efforts, develop new and expanded product offerings, and identify and secure new industry partners and funding sources.

The following pages include sample questions for delegates, exhibiting companies and event organizers/meeting planners. These lists are by no means comprehensive and should only be used as a guide as market information needs can differ destination by destination. Qualified vendors should play a key role in the development of a successful questionnaire and will ensure that the final questionnaire design is directly determined by the information needs identified at the beginning of the research process.

# Sample Questions

## 1. *Delegate Questions*

### **Trip/Travel Party**

1. Was this event the primary purpose of your trip to [Host City]?
2. Please indicate the number of people in your personal travel party, including yourself. (Do not include business associates who attended the event.)
3. How many days and nights did your personal travel party spend in [Host City] as a result of attending this event? Please include any pre-event and/or post-event days/nights. (Include partial days when in the city for less than 24 hours.
  - a. Days in [Host City]
  - b. Nights in [Host City]
4. Please complete the information below regarding your home address (permanent residence).
  - a. Zip/Postal code if inside the United States or Canada
  - b. Country if outside the United States or Canada

### **Accommodations & Transportation**

1. Please check the type(s) of accommodations used by your personal travel party while in the [Host City].
  - a. Hotel
  - b. Motel
  - c. Timeshare or condo
  - d. Stayed with friends or relatives
  - e. Other (bed & breakfast, dormitory, etc.)
  - f. No lodging used (commuted daily)
2. Did you stay in a hotel that was designated specifically for this event? This includes a hotel where a special rate was offered to those attending this event.
3. Did you pay the conference rate for your room(s) or did you obtain an alternative rate by using a different method to book your room?
  - 3b. If you obtained an alternative rate, was it a lower rate?
4. How many rooms did you and your personal travel party use?
  - a. \_\_\_ Check here if you shared a room with a business associate.
5. What was the primary mode of transportation used by your personal travel party to travel to [Host City]?
  - a. Air
  - c. Rail
  - d. Personal or company vehicle
  - e. Rental vehicle
  - f. Other

## Sample Questions (cont'd.)

### Spending

1. Please check all spending categories for which your personal travel party incurred expenses:
  - a. Lodging (hotel/motel, timeshare, etc.)
  - b. Eating & Drinking (food, beverages, snacks, etc.)
  - c. Local Transportation (taxis, bus, subway, car rental, etc.)
  - d. Recreation & Entertainment (museums, cultural attractions, casinos, sports, etc.)
  - e. Shopping
  - f. Other
  
2. All Spending on **Lodging** (room cost, all room-related expenses such as phone calls, Internet usage, in-room movies, mini-bar, laundry/drycleaning, taxes, surcharges, business center, hotel parking/valet, etc.)
  
3. All Spending on **Eating & Drinking** (meals, beverages, snacks, tips, etc.)
  
4. All Spending on **Local Transportation** (car rental, tolls in [host city], fuel purchased in [host city], public/private transportation incl. bus, subway/light rail, taxi, limo, car service, parking/valet fees, etc.)
  
5. Please check all **Entertainment & Recreation** activities in which your personal travel party participated:
  - a. Tours, museums, cultural activities, theme parks
  - b. Performing arts (concerts, symphonies, ballets, plays, etc.)
  - c. Movies
  - d. Sporting events
  - e. Golf or skiing
  - f. Casinos and/or gaming venues
  - g. Other
  
- 5b. All spending (tickets, admission fees, etc.) associated with the above activities.
  
6. All spending on **Shopping** (retail goods, gifts & souvenirs, apparel, electronics, groceries, etc.).

## Sample Questions (cont'd.)

### Sample Exhibiting Company Questions

1. How many days did your organization hold its exhibit in [Host City] (include setup and breakdown days)?
2. Indicate the number of exhibitors from your organization attending all or part of the event. Include your organization's staff involved in exhibit setup/breakdown, event staffing, and all other support staff.
3. Indicate the total number of nights spent in [Host City] by all the exhibitors from your organization.
4. Please check all categories in which you incurred expenses in [Host City].
  - a. Exhibitor lodging
  - b. Exhibitor food, beverage and entertainment
  - c. Exhibit/Booth expenditures (electrical, cleaning, equipment, technology services, vendor services, food/beverage, etc.)
  - d. Exhibiting Company-sponsored functions that were not a part of the event's official schedule (hospitality suites, meeting rooms, off-property functions and other client entertainment, etc.)
  - e. Promotions in [Host City]
  - f. Local transportation in [Host City] (auto rental, taxis, limos, subway, etc.)
  - g. Other expenses
7. Total lodging cost for all exhibitors (room cost, all room-related expenses such as phone calls, Internet usage, in-room movies, mini-bar, laundry/drycleaning, taxes, surcharges, business center, hotel parking/valet, etc.)
8. Total food and beverage expenses for all exhibitors (include taxes, tips, and room service).
9. Exhibit space lease/booth expenses. Include expenditures incurred in [Host City] **only**.
  - a. Exhibit space rental
  - b. Equipment rental for exhibit/booth (furniture, plants/greenery, computers, and audio-visual equipment such as monitors, projectors, screens, carpets, etc.)
  - c. Technology services for exhibit/booth (internet service, networking, and mobile/wireless communications, etc.)
  - d. Vendor services for exhibit/booth (electricity, drayage, cleaning, repairs, installation, exhibit setup/ breakdown, booth/exhibit entertainment, etc.)
  - e. Exhibit/booth food and beverage expenses.
  - f. Other exhibit/booth expenses.
10. Sponsored Functions expenses (include taxes and gratuity) for function(s) you hosted that were not on the event's official schedule. Include expenditures incurred in [Host City] **only**.
  - a. Food and beverage
  - b. Sponsored function space rental fee (do not include your exhibit space rental expenses)
  - c. Equipment rental
  - d. Other expenditures (incl. entertainment, guest speakers, A/V, etc).

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## Sample Questions (cont'd.)

### *Sample Exhibiting Company Questions (con't.)*

11. Promotion and advertising expenditures. Include any expenditures in [Host City] to promote your organization or products to attendees. Examples include room drops, signage, and local vendor promotions.
12. Local transportation expenditures (car rental, tolls in [Host City], fuel purchased in [Host City], public/private transportation [bus, subway/light rail, taxi, limo, car service, etc.], parking/garage/valet fees)
13. Other expenditures not previously recorded.

## Sample Questions (cont'd.)


### Sample Event Organizer/Meeting Planner Questions

1. Please classify your event:
  - a. **Exhibition/Trade Show:** An event where the primary delegate activity is to visit exhibits on the show floor. These events focus primarily on business-to-business relationships.
  - b. **Convention:** An event where the primary delegate activity is to attend educational sessions, participate in meetings/discussions, socialize, or attend other organized events. There is an exhibit component.
  - c. **Meeting:** An event where the primary delegate activity is to attend educational sessions, participate in meetings/discussions, socialize, or attend other organized events. There is no exhibit component to this event.
  - d. **Consumer Show:** An event open to the public, usually requiring an entrance fee
2. Please indicate the published length of your event in terms of days. Be sure to include partial days if applicable. Exclude set-up/tear down time, as well as pre- and post-meetings if they are not part of your published conference schedule.
3. Please indicate the number of hotel rooms used on the peak night of the event.
4. How many delegates actually attended (not registered for) the event to primarily visit the exhibits, or attend meetings and/or conference sessions. Exclude exhibitors, media, speakers, and companions.
5. How many exhibitors (the number of people not companies) who actually attended the event including those who staffed exhibits or assisted those staffing exhibits. Exclude personnel who are employed by the organization that sponsored/managed the event.
6. Others: Indicate the number of non-delegate and non-exhibitor attendees. Include the media, speakers, and any guests/companions.
7. How many exhibiting companies were at the event. Be sure to include organizations sharing exhibit space.
  - a. Total number of exhibiting companies
  - b. From the above total, indicate the number of exhibiting organizations sharing exhibit space
8. Please check all categories in which your organization incurred expenses in the [Host City].
  - a. Food and beverage functions
  - b. Exhibition space fees and services (electrical, cleaning, etc.) to facility
  - c. Additional exhibit hall/meeting room
  - d. Equipment rental (computers, A/V equipment, etc.)
  - e. Technology services (internet, mobile/wireless communications, voice/data communications, etc.)
  - f. Services hired (security, production, transportation, etc.)
  - g. Staff members' living expenses
  - h. Promotional expenses in [Host City]
  - i. Local transportation in [Host City] (auto rental, taxis, limos, bus shuttles, etc.)
  - j. Other expenses

## Sample Questions (cont'd.)

### Sample Event Organizer/Meeting Planner Questions (con't.)

9. Food and beverage expenses for event-sponsored functions. Include catering and staffing costs. Include functions that fed staff and other event personnel as well.
10. Primary event space/facility rental fees. Include only expenditures incurred for usage of space/facility.
11. Secondary event space/meeting hall rental fees. Include only expenditures incurred for usage of space/facility.
12. Equipment rental and leasing fees incurred in [Host City] (LCD projectors, computers, sound equipment, A/V equipment, etc.)
13. Technology service expenditures incurred in [Host City] (voice/data communications, Internet, mobile/wireless communications, etc.)
14. Expenditures for services hired in [Host City] (A/V companies, security, decorators, production companies, transportation companies, photographers, etc.)
15. Total lodging cost for all staff (room cost, all room-related expenses such as phone calls, Internet usage, in-room movies, mini-bar, laundry/drycleaning, taxes, surcharges, business center, hotel parking/valet, etc.)
16. Total food and beverage costs for all staff (include taxes, tips, and room service).
17. Promotional expenditures in [Host City]. Include all types of local signage, radio and TV ads in event market, event-related advertising, and sponsorships.
18. Local transportation expenditures (car rental, local tolls, fuel purchased in the [Host City], public/private transportation including bus, subway/light rail, taxi, limo, car service, parking/garage/valet fees, etc.)
19. Other expenditures in [Host City] not previously recorded.



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