

9-1-2010

Building Association Attendance: Differences Between Chapter, Regional, and Annual Meetings from the Perception of the Association Members

Jill Fjelstul
University of Central Florida, jill.fjelstul@ucf.edu

Kimberly Severt

Deborah Breiter
University of Central Florida, Deborah.Breiter@ucf.edu

 Part of the [Hospitality Administration and Management Commons](#), and the [Tourism and Travel Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/rosenscholar>
University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Rosen College of Hospitality Management at STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Rosen Faculty Scholarship and Creative Works by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

Original Citation

Fjelstul, J, Severt, K., Breiter, D. (2010). Building association attendance: Differences between Chapter, regional, and annual meetings from the perception of the association members. *Event Management*. 14(3), 183-192.

BUILDING ASSOCIATION ATTENDANCE: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHAPTER, REGIONAL, AND ANNUAL MEETINGS FROM THE PERCEPTION OF THE ASSOCIATION MEMBERS

JILL FJELSTUL, KIMBERLY SEVERT, and DEBORAH BREITER

Rosen College of Hospitality Management, University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL, USA

The objective of this study was to identify meeting patterns and trends related to chapter, regional, and/or annual conference attendance. Factors likely to increase attendance, attendance trends over a 5-year period, recommendations by association members, and the preferred mode of delivery were identified. Results will assist meeting planners in providing maximum benefits to association members and to potentially increase attendance at each conference level.

Key words: Associations; Conference attendance; Meetings; Conventions; Meeting type

Introduction

Association planners are charged with fulfilling the educational, networking, and business needs of their memberships and to support the advancement of the industry as a whole. To provide maximum benefit to their association members, it is essential that conference planners understand the patterns linked to meeting attendance decisions. Literature related to the convention industry has historically focused on motivations and inhibitors to conference attendance, host destination factors, and the financial impact association meetings bring to the local economy. Research to date, however, has received little attention in exploring meeting patterns and trends related to chapter, regional, and/or annual conference attendance. The present study was designed to fulfill this research gap.

Objectives of the Study

The study objectives were to:

1. Identify factors likely to increase future meeting attendance at chapter, regional, and annual conferences.
2. Examine trends over a 5-year period based on association member's attendance at chapter, regional, and/or annual conferences.
3. Determine if association members are more likely to attend an annual meeting if they have attended a chapter or regional meeting.
4. Determine if association members are more likely to attend chapter or regional meetings if they attend the annual meeting.
5. Investigate the preferred mode of education delivery.

Literature Review

Attendance plays a vital role in the success of meetings (Fenich, 2008; Oppermann & Chon, 1995) and has a tremendous impact on revenue generation and annual budgets. The financial gains are used to support the educational, networking, and business needs of association members. According to *The Meeting Professional* magazine published by Meeting Professionals International (2008), half of association meetings are expected to generate a profit and on average associations earn approximately 34% of annual income from the association's annual conference and exhibitions (Astroff & Abbey, 2006). As important as attendance is to associations, Hiller (1995) stressed that association convention participation is traditionally voluntary. Many professionals are members of multiple associations. Yoo and Chon (2008) added that individuals have choices in their convention selection process. This not only creates a competitive market for attracting and retaining association members, but also provides association members a wider selection of industry education and networking events to choose from. Association members select which chapter, regional, and/or annual meetings to attend based on program content, budget constraints, and the primary needs of the association member.

Numerous studies have identified motivators and inhibitors to meeting attendance, but few have focused on motivations related to chapter, regional, annual, or international attendance. Lee and Back (2007b) provided a review of literature on association meeting participation dating from the early 1990s. Education, networking, and leadership were motivators to conference attendance in early studies (Grant & Weaver, 1996, Rittichainuwat, Beck, & Lalopa, 2001). Additional motivators have included traveling (Ngamsom & Beck, 2000; Rittichainuwat et al., 2001), destination (Grant & Weaver, 1996), and change of pace (Ngamsom & Beck, 2000). Inhibitors to meeting attendance have also been identified. Funding (Oppermann, 1995), scheduling (Oppermann, 1998), and family issues (Rittichainuwat et al., 2002) contribute to nonattendance. In regards to regional conventions, factors contributing to meeting attendance included activities and opportunities, networking,

convenience, education benefits, products available for purchase at exhibits, and conference package pricing (Severt, Wang, Chen, & Breiter, 2007). And on an international scope, Rittichainuwat et al. (2001) identified sightseeing, self-enhancement, and business/conference activities as the leading motivators for conference attendance. Inhibitors to international meeting attendance resulted in destination barriers such as logistics of travel (i.e., distance, time, and money) (Rittichainuwat et al., 2001). In another study, approximately 10% wanted to attend international conferences but expensive travel costs prohibited such travel. Participants stated, however, that travel over holidays and summers would minimize their scheduling concerns (Rittichainuwat et al., 2001). Lee and Park (2002) found the service-related factors of program scheduling, language fluency, and professional attitude are significant to international conference attendance. Ngamsom and Beck (2000) found travel experience, professional development, and social activities should be considered when packaging international conferences. It is important to note limitations to the referenced studies. The majority indicated convenience sampling as a major concern. Results would not be generalizable to the corporate attendee, only to the association member attendee.

Destination site selection has also received notable attention in relation to meeting attendance. Oppermann (1995) stated that selecting a more favorable location, including notables of entertainment, scenery, and accessibility, may improve attendance. Ngamsom and Beck (2000) added climate and cultural attractions. Lee and Park (2002) reported hotel facilities, safety, tourism outlets, and accessibility as important destination attributes. Lee and Back (2003) reported hotel cleanliness, availability of nearby restaurants, and hotel room comfort as top categories from meeting attendees' perceptions. Matching destination attributes and attendee preferences should improve attendance and subsequently generate more revenue for the local economy.

The convention industry's financial impact on local economies has been studied. More specifically, hotels, resorts, restaurants, rental car companies, and tourism outlets in host communities receive revenues from conventions attendees. Annual

meetings are highly profitable to the local hospitality and tourism industry because of the number of delegates attending the conference destination (Lee & Back, 2008, p. 332). Meeting destinations compete heavily to host association meetings due to the direct and indirect economic benefits (Lee & Back, 2007a). Oppermann (1995) found economic impacts from meeting attendees are significantly greater than from that of the traditional visitor due to their length of stay. Oppermann (1995) also concluded that satisfaction during an attendee's stay may lead to future visits. Ngamson and Beck (2000) found attendees were attracted by pre- and postconference activities and comparable accommodation prices throughout their stay. Both increased their likelihood of attendance, subsequently contributing to the local economy beyond the convention dates.

Methodology

Questionnaire Development

After a thorough review of the literature, a set of questions was created by the researchers to address the objectives of the study. Because there was no previous study addressing a similar research inquiry in the convention industry, the researchers created the initial set of questions and then submitted the questions to the PCMA research committee for review. The PCMA research committee consisted of 10 industry professionals who had a vast array of experience in the meetings and convention industry from a planning, research, and evaluation perspective. Numerous draft revisions were conducted until the researchers and the PCMA research committee were confident in the face validity and reliability of the questions. The survey instrument was first administered to association members attending a local chapter meeting to verify reliability of the questions. Next, an electronic survey was developed from the final draft. The electronic survey included items for general demographics, would one encourage colleagues to attend chapter, regional or annual meetings, frequencies of attendance at chapter, regional, and annual meetings, and if members are more or less likely to attend the annual meeting if they had attended chapter or regional meetings. The final section of the questionnaire identified factors that

would increase attendance at chapter, regional, and annual meetings. This included such points as: the relevance of program, meeting cost, employer reward system for attending association meetings, financial support, and adjustment to workload in order to attend, employer encouragement to participate, speaker selection, and length of meeting.

Population and Sample

The primary membership of PCMA consists of meeting planners, such as association planners, corporate planners, and independent planners and suppliers, and those who supply venue space and/or services to the meeting planner. The focus of this study is on the association market. The PCMA research committee was comprised of eight association planners. Four of the association planners agreed to survey their association members for this study. Although this was a convenience sampling approach, two of the associations were trade associations and two were medical association, providing a variety of industry and professional members of associations.

The tailored design method (TDM) was employed to maximize the response rate. First the association president sent an email to all the members to introduce the study and encourage members to participate in the study. The second notification was emailed and contained the link to the survey along with the message of the importance of participation in the study. The third step was a follow-up email to thank the members who had participated in the survey and encourage others to participate. Again the survey link was provided. The fourth step was to send another email 10 days after the third notification and the fifth and final contact was another email to elicit a response. The population for the study was the total association membership of the four participating associations, 5,591. The sample was the 902 association members who responded to the survey. This process resulted in 885 usable surveys.

To meet the study objectives, factor analysis was used to determine the importance of the stated factors to increase attendance in chapter, regional and annual meetings. Descriptive statistics were used for 1) rank order and to establish trends of attendance, 2) to determine if association members

are more or less likely to attend an annual meeting if they had previously attended a chapter or regional meeting, and 3) to investigate the preferred mode of delivery. Cross-tabs were used to determine the difference in respondent's job category based on how they responded to financial support concerns. Respondents were asked to indicate which, if any, of the factors would increase their attendance at chapter, regional, or annual meetings. The results were ranked based on importance of increasing attendance. Principal component analysis (PCA) was used to determine if there were differences or similarities between the factors to increase attendance for each type of meeting. Next the researchers compared the results to determine similarities and differences between what may increase attendance in chapter, regional, and annual association meetings.

Results

Participant Profile

The present study identified the following demographics to better understand the study population: age, career stage, association longevity, and workforce affiliations. Table 1 depicts the participants' profile. Briefly, the majority of respondents were 43 years of age or older (78%) with less than 2% of the study population between the ages of 18 and 26. The majority of the study population was female. Additionally, the respondents identified if they were currently in their 1st career, second career, third career, or fourth career. The majority of respondents were in their first career (58%) with 29% in their second career. Respondents were also asked how long they have been a member of their current association. The largest representation has been members of their current association 1–5 years (31.9%). The other term lengths were represented with only slight variation. And, as noted previously, respondents were asked how long they have been in the workforce full-time. The majority have been full-time in the workforce for 21 or more years (71%) with 17.3% full-time for 11–20 years. Respondents were also asked how long they have been in their current profession. The largest representation was in their current profession for 16 years or longer (48.7%). The smallest representation have been in their profession for less than 1 year (<5%). Lastly, current

Table 1
Demographics and Participate Profile

	Frequency	%
Age		
18–26	11	1.3
27–32	42	4.9
33–42	122	14.1
43–52	319	36.9
53–61	305	35.3
62+	66	7.6
Total	865	100
Gender		
Male	163	18.9
Female	701	81.1
Total	864	100
Career stage		
First career	511	59.1
Second career	253	29.2
Third career	70	8.1
Fourth career	31	3.6
Total	865	100
Membership in current association		
<1 year	113	13.0
1–5 years	282	32.4
6–10 years	149	17.1
11–15 years	123	14.1
16–20 years	100	11.5
21 years or more	104	11.9
Total	871	100
Current profession longevity		
<1 year	43	5.0
1–2 years	69	8.0
3–5 years	100	11.6
6–10 years	115	13.3
11–15 years	104	12.1
16 years or more	431	50.0
Total	862	100
Current employer longevity		
<1 year	70	8.1
1–2 years	103	11.9
3–5 years	168	19.4
6–10 years	144	16.6
11–15 years	104	12.0
16 years or more	277	32.0
Total	866	100

There were a total of 885 useable surveys; therefore, the difference in totals represents missing data.

employer longevity was requested. The largest representation has been with their current employer 16 years or longer (31.3%). In contrast, the smallest representation has been with their current employer less than 1 year (7.9%).

Factors Likely to Increase Attendance at Chapter, Regional, and Annual Conferences

PCA was utilized to investigate the underlying dimensions of factors that would likely influence

attendance at the following types of association meetings: chapter, regional, and annual conferences. Factor analysis on each of the three meetings was performed and results compared. Two things were examined to identify if the data were appropriate for this type of analysis. First, the ratio on number of variables to sample size was deemed appropriate (865:11) and second, the correlation matrix was examined and deemed appropriate due to the coefficients being greater than 0.3. Two other statistical measures were completed. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was higher than 0.6 as suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) and was 0.891 for chapter meetings, 0.879 for regional meetings, and 0.839 for annual meetings. The result of the Bartlett's test was significant at $p < 0.000$ for all three meeting types. A factor with an Eigenvalue of greater than 1 was the basis for determining which factors were retained. A variable was determined to have a sufficient loading on a factor if it had a factor loading of 0.5 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1995).

The same 11 variables were considered for each of the three types of meetings. For chapter meetings the data reduced to two factors. The first factor extracted was named "employer support" and the second factor extracted was named "program content." Although the second factor had only one variable to load, when taken out of analysis, the explained variance decreased by 10%. It was concluded that the factor should be retained in the analysis. From the initial 11 variables, two did not load on either factor. They were Q8 (if the meetings were in the summer at a family-oriented vacation destination) and Q11 (if the length of session was 3–4 days). Q11 does not apply to chapter meetings as they are typically on a monthly basis for only an hour or two in length.

For regional meetings the data were also reduced to two factors and very similar to the chapter meeting results. The only key difference was that the relevance of the program and length of session being 1–2 days, loaded with securing better speakers, increased the factor loading to three factors. Again, Q8 (if the meetings were in the summer at a family-oriented vacation destination) did not load on either factor as with Q2 (meeting cost).

The data results for annual meetings reduced to

three factors. The first factor was "employer support," the second factor extracted was "program content," and the third was "program length." The only variable that did not load was Q8 (if the meetings were in the summer at a family-oriented vacation destination). Table 2 depicts the factor analysis comparison between chapter, regional, and annual meeting attendance.

Rank Order of Variables to Increase Attendance

Respondents were asked to indicate which of the factors listed would increase their attendance at the specified meeting type. The responses were coded 1 if the factor would increase their attendance and 0 if the factor would not increase their attendance. A descending rank order was then computed to determine the rank order based on the number of respondents who indicated that the given factor would increase their attendance to the meeting type. Table 3 depicts the ranking of importance to increase attendance for chapter, regional, and annual meetings.

The leading influence likely to increase attendance at a chapter meeting was the relevance of the program. The second influence reported was securing better speakers, followed by receiving employer financial support to attend the conference. The fourth and fifth influences for chapter attendance were receiving encouragement from my employer to attend and an employer established value/reward system for promotion, respectively. Regional conference attendance influences were depicted as follows. The leading influence was relevance of the program, followed by receiving financial support for my attendance. Meeting cost ranked third in regards to regional conference influence. Securing better speakers ranked fourth with an employer-established value/reward system as the fifth leading influence for regional attendance. The following influences were in relation to annual conference attendance. The leading influence in attending an annual meeting was relevance of the program. The second influence was receiving financial support from their employer. The third influence was meeting cost, followed by securing better speakers. The fifth ranked influence for attendance at an annual conference was the encouragement from my employer to attend

Table 2

Factor Analysis Comparison Between Chapter, Regional, and Annual Meeting on Factors That May Increase Attendance

Chapter Meeting		Regional Meeting		Annual Meeting		
F1	F2	F1	F2	F1: Employer	F2: Content	F3: Length
Q1: 0.570		Q3: 0.727		Q2: 0.543		
Q2: 0.663		Q4: 0.731		Q3: 0.751		
Q3: 0.706		Q5: 0.806		Q4: 0.741		
Q4: 0.793		Q6: 0.738		Q5: 0.760		
Q5: 0.746		Q7: 0.733		Q6: 0.737		
Q6: 0.743			Q1: 0.691	Q7: 0.718		
Q7: 0.743			Q9: 0.774			Q1: 0.748
Q10: 0.531			Q10: 0.705		Q9: 0.788	Q10: 0.787
	Q9: 0.585					Q11: 0.710
Total variance 57.59%		Total variance 59.0%		Total variance 59.0%		
KMO 0.891		KMO 0.879		KMO 0.839		
Bartlett's test 0.000		Bartlett's test 0.000		Bartlett's test 0.000		

Question Reference: Please indicate which would increase your attendance.

Q1: Relevance of program

Q2: Meeting cost

Q3: Employer would establish a value/reward system for work promotion criteria

Q4: My employer would offer financial support for my

Q5: My employer would adjust my workload to permit/compensate for meeting attendance

Q6: My employer would provide encouragement to attend

Q7: My employer would provide financial support if I am on the meeting agenda

Q8: If the meetings were in the summer at a family-oriented vacation destination

Q9: Secure better speakers

Q10: If length of session was 1–2 days

Q11: If length of session was 3– days

the meeting. Table 3 depicts the 11 ranked influences for chapter, regional, and annual conference attendance, including the five leading influences previously outlined.

Table 4 expands Table 3 by identifying the frequency and percentage of participants who indicated which associated factors would increase their attendance at the corresponding meeting type. Comparing the three types of meetings, percentages were the highest for all the factors relating to the annual meeting except for one factor (if length of session was 1–2 days). Regional meeting percentages were higher than the chapter percentages on all the factors. Because chapter meetings are typically closer in proximity to attendees' home location, the results suggest that the level of importance for each of these factors increase as distance to the meeting increases.

Attendance Patterns

Respondents reported their attendance at chapter, regional, and annual conferences for the previous 5 years. Table 5 outlines their attendance records. Attendance has decreased over the past 5 years at all three conference levels.

Respondents were asked if they were more or less likely to attend a chapter or regional conference if they planned to attend the annual conference. Approximately 24% indicated they were more likely to attend a chapter or regional conference if they attended the annual conference, while 58.2% indicated their attendance at the annual conference had no influence on attendance elsewhere. Respondents were also asked if they were more or less likely to attend an annual conference if they attended a chapter or regional meeting. Ap-

Table 3
Ranking of Importance to Increase Attendance for Chapter, Regional, and Annual Meetings

Rank	Chapter	Regional	Annual
1	Relevance of program	Relevance of program	Relevance of program
2	Secure better speakers	My employer would offer financial support for my attendance	My employer would offer financial support for my attendance
3	My employer would offer financial support for my attendance	Meeting cost	Meeting cost
4	Meeting cost	Secure better speakers	Secure better speakers
5	My employer would provide encouragement to attend	My employer would provide encouragement to attend	My employer would provide encouragement to attend
6	Employer would establish a value/reward system for work promotion criteria	If length of session was 1–2 days	My employer would provide financial support if I am on the meeting agenda
7	My employer would provide financial support if I am on the meeting agenda	My employer would provide financial support if I am on the meeting agenda	My employer would adjust my workload to permit/compensate for meeting attendance
8	My employer would adjust my workload to permit/compensate for meeting attendance	My employer would adjust my workload to permit/compensate for meeting attendance	Employer would establish a value/reward system for work promotion criteria
9	If length of session was 1–2 days	Employer would establish a value/reward system for work promotion criteria	If length of session was 3–4 days
10	If the meetings were in the summer at a family-oriented vacation destination	If the meetings were in the summer at a family-oriented vacation destination	If length of session was 1–2 days
11	If length of session was 3–4 days	If length of session was 3–4 days	If the meetings were in the summer at a family-oriented vacation destination

Table 4
Frequency and Percentage of Factors to Increase Attendance at Chapter, Regional, and Annual Meetings

Please indicate which, if any, would increase your attendance at Chapter, Regional or Annual Meetings (<i>N</i> = 885)	Chapter Meeting	Regional Meeting	Annual Meeting
Relevance of program	578 (65.3%)	567 (64.0%)	662 (74.8%)
Meeting cost	280 (31.6%)	355 (40.1%)	560 (63.2%)
Employer would establish a value/reward system for work promotion criteria	242 (27.3%)	260 (29.3%)	350 (39.0%)
My employer would offer financial support for my attendance	307 (34.6%)	408 (46.1%)	590 (66.6%)
My employer would adjust my workload to permit/compensate for meeting attendance	216 (24.4%)	261 (29.4%)	372 (42.0%)
My employer would provide encouragement to attend	278 (31.4%)	309 (34.9%)	425 (48.0%)
My employer would provide financial support if I am on the meeting agenda	224 (25.3%)	284 (32.0%)	405 (45.7%)
If the meetings were in the summer at a family-oriented vacation destination	80 (9.0%)	111 (12.5%)	184 (20.0%)
Secure better speakers	319 (36.0%)	344 (38.8%)	434 (49.0%)
If length of session was 1–2 days	216 (24.4%)	286 (32.3%)	266 (30.0%)
If length of session was 3–4 days	52 (5.8%)	84 (9.4%)	292 (32.9%)

Percentage indicates the percent of participants who indicated the associated factor would increase their attendance at the identified meeting type.

Table 5
Meeting Attendance for Chapter, Regional, and Annual Meetings Over a 5-Year Period

Year	Chapter	Regional	Annual
2002	764	838	831
2003	762	835	831
2004	749	833	827
2005	723	806	818
2006	676	791	789

proximately 23% indicated they were more likely to attend the annual conference if they attended a chapter or regional meeting, while 63.3% indicated their attendance at a chapter or regional conference had no influence on their annual conference attendance.

Respondents were also asked if they would encourage others to attend conferences. Approximately 90% of the respondents would encourage attendance at the annual conference level, 75% would encourage others to attend regional conferences, and 68% would encourage others to attend chapter meetings.

Lastly, Table 6 depicts the respondent's preferred mode of delivery while attending meetings. Listening to a guest speaker was the most preferred mode, followed by discussions and demonstrations, respectively.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to explore meeting patterns and trends related to chapter, regional, and/or annual conference attendance. A significant finding related to meeting attendance is the reported decline in attendance in the past 5

years at all three levels. Such pattern is disheartening for the meeting industry; however, findings from this study offer the influences for future attendance consideration specific to the chapter, regional, and annual conferences.

Findings from this study suggest that the leading factors to increase attendance are relatively similar for regional and annual conferences, varying slightly in order of influence at the chapter level. Relevance of the program was the leading influence for all conferences, strongly suggesting that much credence should be taken to match the program agenda to the current needs of association members. This finding is consistent with the literature, supporting previous studies that education, networking, and leadership are motivators to conference attendance (Grant, 1994; Grant & Weaver, 1996; Price, 1993; Rittichainuwat et al., 2001). The second leading influence for chapter attendance differs slightly in importance as compared to regional and annual attendance. Securing better speakers is ranked as the second influence for attendance at the chapter level but is ranked as the fourth influence for regional and annual attendance. This is a significant finding for those in charge of chapter meetings with the goal of improving attendance. Identifying a notable speaker with related expertise would be a critical component for enhancing attendance at the chapter level. Unfortunately, this charge is subject to perception by the membership. Strong communication with the membership such as who they would like as a speaker, topics they would like delivered, and expertise they would deem attractive are essential attributes in securing appropriate speakers. Financial-related factors and receiving financial support for attendance and meetings costs are the second and third ranked influences for regional and annual conference attendance and the third and fourth ranked influence for chapter events. Meeting costs are a concern. It would be assumed that chapter meetings would have lower meeting costs in relation to regional or annual meetings due to their proximity to members, thus the reason for a slightly lower ranking for chapter meetings. Regional and annual meeting planners should, however, take note with two of their top three influences concerning finances. Corporations are experiencing budget cuts across all industries. Ex-

Table 6
Preferred Mode of Delivery

Ranking	Mode of Delivery	Frequency (%)
1	Guest speaker	807 (91.1%)
2	Discussions	650 (73.4%)
3	Demonstrations	584 (65.9%)
4	Exhibits	532 (60.1%)
5	Technology based	432 (48.8%)
6	Poster sessions	340 (38.4%)
7	Role plays	93 (10.5%)

penditures are closely monitored. An outreach to corporations as program agendas are created, while addressing the needs specific to their company, may secure financial support for members by their employers as there will be a perceived value and relevance for their employee's attendance at conferences.

The present study reported declining attendance over the past 5 years at all three levels. A decline in attendance may be attributed to not meeting the needs of the members, but may also be due to other factors such as technology and the economy. Technology has reduced travel-related expenses with professional opportunities delivered via distance education modalities, thus becoming a more attractive option for professional development. In tough financial times, funding by the employer is reduced or eliminated, thus private pay affordability may be in question. Career stage may also influence meeting attendance. The present study indicated the majority of respondents were in their first or second career and have been in their current profession for 21+ years. The potential for redundancy in meeting agendas would be assumedly greater with longevity in their work cycle.

Employer encouragement to attend meetings was also a ranked influence for all three conference levels. This is surprising yet significant. It would be assumed that in troubling financial times, employees would feel less inclined to request time away from work to attend association meetings, let alone request financial support for their attendance. Cross tabs investigated how management-level respondents viewed financial incentives for increased meeting attendance. Approximately 68% of the CEOs did not view such incentive as impacting meeting attendance. However, the VPs, directors, and managers responded favorably to employer support for increased meeting attendance. It would be assumed that CEOs have the ultimate responsibility of balancing the budget and may view this expenditure as unjustifiable during tough economic times. On the other hand, key decision makers such as the other three position titles may have more awareness to the benefits of meetings for their employees, thus responding more favorably for financial support from the employer. Establishing communication channels with the industry's key leaders, address-

ing their employee and business needs, and providing relevant program agendas may channel increased attendance support.

Respondents identified their preferred mode of delivery while attending meetings. It appears that face-to-face interactions were more preferred than technology based and/or less interactive sessions. Such preferences would appear complimentary to previous notations regarding relevance of the program and securing better speakers as leading factors influencing meeting attendance.

Conclusions

Little research has been directed towards attendance patterns and trends at the chapter, regional, and/or annual level. The present study identified influences to potentially increase attendance specific to chapter, regional, and annual conferences. Such insight is critical to meeting planners and association leaders as they strive to improve meeting attendance and to enhance their service to their respective membership. The present study, however, did not address the issue of membership attractiveness. It would be assumed that a larger membership base would generate greater attendance numbers at conferences. Identifying factors influencing decisions to join an association may not only increase membership bases but consequently enhance attendance at all three meeting levels. Importantly, the present study found that a high percentage of members would encourage others to attend meetings. A suggestion would be to encourage members to invite a guest to their next chapter, regional, and/or annual meeting. Not only would such action increase attendance at the respective meetings but also may encourage their guest to join the respective membership association.

The present study had limitations. First, the study utilized convenience sampling for participation. This resulted in only four associations represented. Second, there were a high percentage of female respondents. The participating associations are predominantly female by nature, thus explaining such dominance. A recommendation for future research, to offset such limitations, would be to replicate the present study to include multiple associations in various disciplines. Attendance pat-

terns by gender could then be identified by association type. Professional development needs could also be depicted by association type with such expansion. The present study also indicated a decreasing attendance pattern. An additional recommendation would be to examine how various associations market chapter, regional, and annual meetings to their members. Future research could also determine the value of chapter and regional meetings and market to those who traditionally attend only annual meetings. Such focus may result in joint marketing efforts for all levels of association meetings. In conclusion, the recommendations discussed are complimentary to the findings of the present study. Each should influence future attendance patterns at the chapter, regional, and annual meetings and enhance the benefits afforded to respective association members.

References

- Astroff, M., & Abbey, J. (2006). *Convention sales and services* (7th ed.). Las Vegas, NV: Waterbury Press.
- Fenich, G. (2008). *Meetings, expositions, events, and conventions* (2nd ed.). New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Grant, Y. N. J. (1994). *Factors that contribute to the selection process of meetings from the perspective of the attendee*. Unpublished master's thesis, Virginia Polytechnic and State University, Blacksburg, VA.
- Grant, Y. N. J., & Weaver, P. A. (1996). The meeting selection process: A demographic profile of attendees clustered by criteria utilized in selecting meetings. *Hospitality Research Journal*, 20(1), 57–71.
- Hair, J., Anderson, R., Tatham, R., & Black, W. (1995). *Multivariate data analysis* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Hiller, H. H. (1995). Conventions as mega-events: A new model for convention-host city relationships. *Tourism Management*, 16(5), 375–379.
- Lee, M. J., & Back, K. J. (2003). Measuring association members' perceived importance and performance of convention attributes. *Hospitality, Foodservice, and Tourism Research and Education: The Asian Waves*, 1, 493–504.
- Lee, M. J., & Back, K. J. (2007a). Associations' members meeting participation behaviors: Development of a meeting participation model. *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, 22(2), 15–33.
- Lee, M. J., & Back, K. J. (2007b). Effects of destination image on meeting participation intentions: Empirical findings from a professional association and its annual convention. *The Service Industries Journal*, 27(1), 59–73.
- Lee, J. S., & Back, K. J. (2008). Attendee-based brand equity. *Tourism Management*, 29, 331–344.
- Lee, T. H., & Park, J. Y. (2002). Study on the degree of importance of convention service factors: Focusing on the differences in perception between convention planners and participants. *Journal of Convention and Exhibition Management*, 3(4), 69–85.
- Meeting Professionals International. (2008, January). Future watch 2008. *The Meeting Professional*. Dallas, TX: Author.
- Ngamsom, B., & Beck, J. (2000). A pilot study of motivations, inhibitors, and facilitators of association members in attending international conferences. *Journal of Convention and Exhibition Management*, 22(2/3), 98–111.
- Oppermann, M. (1995). Professional conference attendees' and non-attendees participation decision factors. *Society of Travel and Tourism Educators*, 7(1), 25–37.
- Oppermann, M. (1998). Association involvement and convention participation. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 21(3), 17–30.
- Oppermann, M., & Chon, K. S. (1995). Factors influencing professional conference participation by association members: A pilot study of convention tourism. *Proceedings of the Travel and Tourism Research Association Conference*, 26, 254–259.
- Price, C. (1993). *An empirical study of the value of professional association meetings from the perspective of attendees*. Ph.D. dissertation, Virginia Polytechnic and State University, Blacksburg, VA.
- Rittichainuwat, B. N., Beck, J. A., & LaLopa, J. (2001). Understanding motivations, inhibitors, and facilitators of association members in attending international conferences. *Journal of Convention and Exhibition Management*, 3(3), 45–62.
- Severt, D., Wang, Y., Chen, P. J., & Breiter, D., (2007). Examining the motivation, perceived performance, and behavioral intentions of convention attendees: Evidence from a regional conference. *Tourism Management*, 28, 399–408.
- Tabachnick, B. G., & Fidell, L. S. (2001). *Using multivariate statistics* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Yoo, J. J., & Chon, K. (2008). Factors affecting convention participation decision-making: Developing a measurement scale. *Journal of Travel Research*, 47, 113–122.