The Joint Meetings Industry Council (JMIC) was established in 1978 to provide a communications link amongst international associations engaged in the Meetings Industry and a means of collectively reviewing industry conditions and strategies and has met for this purpose twice annually since then. During this period it developed an industry award – the Unity Award – to recognize individuals and/or organization that have made exemplary contributions to the advancement of the industry.

In 2003, JMIC commissioned a review of its role and the potential for developing a more aggressive industry advocacy program to support its members in their efforts to raise overall industry awareness and appreciation. As a result, it developed a new program – the Profile and Power Program – that was designed to both encourage and recognize initiatives to enhance the overall image of the industry and the economic and professional impacts it delivers. This program consisted primarily of establishing a consistent set of industry messaging along with “tools” such as guidebooks and promotional materials including presentations, advertisements and articles to assist in carrying out local industry promotional activities. Along with encouraging the exchange of information amongst industry members who had successfully developed such programs, it also included a second award – the Profile and Power Award – that is made annually as a way of recognizing individuals and organizations who have made significant contributions to advancing the awareness and influence of the Meetings Industry in their respective communities.
JMIC today:

- To maintain a forum for the exchange of information and expertise amongst organizations that represent the various sectors of the meetings industry.
- To support and carry out activities that promote the profile of the meetings industry as a distinct and important part of the global economy.
- To provide a collective voice for the industry in areas of overall concern.
- To formally recognize the achievements of individuals who have successfully advanced the positioning and professionalism of the industry on an international basis.

JMIC Objectives

- To provide a collective voice for the industry in areas of overall concern.
- To formally recognize the achievements of individuals who have successfully advanced the positioning and professionalism of the industry on an international basis.
- To maintain a forum for the exchange of information and expertise amongst organizations that represent the various sectors of the meetings industry.
- To support and carry out activities that promote the profile of the meetings industry as a distinct and important part of the global economy.
THE COUNCIL CONSISTS OF ITS MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS

JMIC members:

AT PRESENT, THESE ARE:

- AIPC | the International Association of Congress Centres
- COCAL | the Latin American Confederation of PCO and Related Companies
- DMAI | Destination Marketing Association International
- ECM | European Cities Marketing
- EFAPCO | the European Federation of Associations of Professional Congress Organizers
- EVVC | the European Association of Event Centres
- IAPCO | the International Association of Professional Congress Organizers
- ICCA | the International Congress and Convention Association
- MPI | Meeting Professionals International
- PCMA | the Professional Convention Association Management Association
- SITE | the Society of Incentive & Travel Executives
- UFI | the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry

For further JMIC information and contact details, refer to our web site at www.themeetingsindustry.org
As a group devoted to information exchange and the advancement of the meetings, convention, exhibitions and incentive sectors, JMIC has viewed with concern the low profile this industry has had relative to other business areas that are affected by both public and government attitudes and decisions. This concern has become greater over the past few years as global economic and security-related conditions have resulted in a more challenging business environment and one in which decisions are being made with important implications for the future of the industry.

In order to act on this concern, JMIC has begun a cooperative program to encourage members of the industry to become more active in “telling their story” to their respective communities and governments. The basis for this program is the concept that individual members in their own communities are in the best position to do this, and that the best role for an industry group like JMIC is to support and encourage these efforts by providing appropriate materials and a program framework. This Guide to Community and Government Relations is a part of this initiative. It will be accompanied by additional resources for the use of all members of its participating associations, including a collection of web-based materials such as feature articles, advertisements and industry facts that members can adapt to their own needs along with case studies and reports by member associations documenting their own achievements in addressing community advocacy issues and opportunities.
Many governments played a key role in this. Not only did many question legitimate meetings and incentive-related business activity – particularly where public money was involved – but at the same time cancelled their own meetings and related travel as cost-saving measures, which only served to re-enforce that they placed little value on these kinds of activities. This demonstrated that such governments really had no idea what meetings do in terms of driving economic and professional development – and as a result, couldn’t see what kind of a role they could and should be playing in their own number one priority, which was economic recovery.

The industry was vulnerable to this situation because it had neglected to prepare the arguments and develop the data that could respond to even the most superficial challenge. We didn’t have the messages; we didn’t have the data to back them up and we didn’t have the vehicles in place to deliver them effectively.

There was a great deal of industry discussion around these events and what should be done to respond. A number of actions emerged as priorities, including:

- A need to emphasize the role that meetings play in economic, professional and educational development;
- A need to emphasise the serious purposes of meetings and conventions and to downplay the leisure aspect;
- A need to enhance both the content and perceived value of meetings in order to give planners and delegates the arguments they need to justify their investment of time and resources;
- The importance of creating new arguments to balance concerns around sustainability, and to show how the benefits outweigh the impacts associated with delegate travel;
- The importance of delivering these messages at a local level where they have a greater impact and reality, including measurement tools that have significance at that local level, and
- A need to move beyond hospitality metrics and instead demonstrate the value associated with meetings outcomes.

A NEW URGENCY:

The financial crisis and accompanying economic recession of 2009 created a new and more disturbing issue in which the role and value of meetings were being questioned in many parts of the world. Instead of seeing meetings and conventions as an essential component of economic and professional development, they were being characterized by many as a waste of time and money.

By early 2009 things had reached the point where surveys were showing high levels of concern about industry image, not only amongst planners but also the corporations that made up much of the meetings business base. And while these impacts were certainly most intense in North America – in particular the US – and parts of Europe, they demonstrated clearly a vulnerability that could appear anywhere in the world given similar conditions.
Community support for hosting potentially disruptive events
Transportation and travel policy (competitive access)
National and international security measures
Local and national taxation policies
It’s at a local community level that these issues have most of their effect. Most decisions are local ones, or those over which local politicians have the greatest influence. Even the issues which involve national policies are most likely to be influenced by local government acting with senior government on behalf of their communities.

As our industry grows, so do its impacts and interactions with the rest of the community. We need awareness and understanding to get the kind of support needed for the industry to continue growing and prospering.

Government debt – much of it accumulated in an effort to stimulate economic recovery - has become a major ongoing concern, and one that many observers feel is likely to have a major impact for at least a decade. This will make major capital decisions – in particular, those associated with investment in convention facilities – much more challenging, and the rationale to proceed will need to be much more compelling.

There are new government policies and priorities being established every day that have important implications for our industry, but often we have no input to these decisions to protect our interests. Such areas as taxation, transportation, immigration and facility construction are all critical to our futures, yet often we have no influence over them.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?
There need to be good reasons for members of the industry – that’s you – to see the value in participating in any of these activities. Many already do, and have active community and government relations activities underway in their own areas. For those who are still wondering, here are some thoughts:

> Government and community attitudes shape our working environment as an industry. They control major decisions that determine our future, including such things as;
> Capital investment in meetings facilities
> Investment in meetings marketing and promotion
> Local infrastructure development (i.e., hotels)

WHAT'S CHANGED?
The impacts of the recent financial crisis and economic recession brought many of the most urgent issues to a head as described above. However, many of these issues had been evolving for some time, and the crisis simply accentuated their impact.

Over the past few years, a number of important changes have been intensified the need to “get on the agenda” with our communities and governments. Some of the new factors include:

> Recent geopolitical, economic, transportation turmoil has brought many issues into a sharper focus. For example, many governments have been intensifying security measures, which has a major effect on how delegates and exhibits move around.

> Competition for resources has intensified. In a tougher economy, many other groups are after the same money that the industry needs for new investment.

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Additional Resources and Links will be regularly added to the JMIC website at www.themeetingsindustry.org
WHAT WE’VE LEARNED:

- A low profile means little influence – you can’t get much support from your community or government when they don’t even know you exist!

- Awareness and understanding are the keys to support. When people understand what we do and the kinds of benefits we generate, they are much more likely to provide the needed levels of support.

- We’re lost in the broader tourism message, even though our story is a very different one. Meetings and conventions have very different kinds of needs and benefits from the leisure travel sector, but they are often confused in the public mind, which doesn’t help either sector.

- As a result of all this, we’re vulnerable to adverse funding, policy decisions that can have big impacts on our operations and activities.

AS AN INDUSTRY, WE’VE ALSO LEARNED A LOT ABOUT OUR OWN POSITION OVER THE GLOBAL DISRUPTIONS OF THE LAST FEW YEARS. AMONG THESE LESSONS ARE:

WHAT’S THIS GUIDE FOR?

The answer is to get out and tell our story in our communities!

The fact is, our industry has a great story to tell:

- We are of major economic importance, and a big tax generator
- We are critical to fortunes of other businesses, who need our activities to access markets, share information and educate their members
- We provide a “safety net” for tourism, since convention delegates will travel when many other people will not for purely personal reasons
- We are an essential element in the economic recovery process
- Above all, we play an important role in creating global understanding at a time when this is more important than ever.
A program to build awareness of the Meetings Industry has to begin at the local level.

THE COMMUNITY | GOVERNMENT CONNECTION:

The single most important group in terms of influencing our business success within our individual communities is government. As indicated above, they most often control funding for facilities, policies that affect our competitiveness and programs that affect our success in the market. Their understanding and support is often the difference between industry growth and stagnation.

But community opinion, in turn, is the greatest factor influencing government decisions. If government perceives that there is community support for a particular initiative, they are far more likely to act that if they see little enthusiasm. On the other hand, few governments will launch an initiative if they believe there is public opposition or that there are higher priorities in the minds of voters.

As a result, it’s not enough to just convince our governments of the importance of what we do and the support we need. It’s also necessary to build community support in order to encourage government to act. By demonstrating that there is community understanding and support for the industry, we are helping to create the conditions that will enable government to take actions that support our needs.

WHY YOU?

At this point, you may be saying: why me? The simple fact is, a program to build awareness of the Meetings Industry and what it does has to begin at the local level. Unlike many other industries, there is no overall industry organization with the responsibility for promoting the meetings, conventions, exhibitions and incentive sectors. The success of this program is therefore dependent on many individuals working within their own communities.

However, there are some very good reasons why this is the best approach:

＞ Most important decisions affecting the industry are made at a local level.

＞ Your own community is where you can have the biggest effect: you know your own issues and opportunities better than anyone!

＞ The big policy decisions that affect the industry are usually driven “from the bottom up”, which means convincing local governments of important issues will produce the best results.

＞ You have the best contacts, opportunities and credibility within your own community.

＞ Finally, you have the most at stake – if you succeed in improving awareness of what you achieve for your community, you’re the one who will get the most out of it!
how can you use this guide?

Developing a plan:

- Start early – before you need it
- Identify the key decision makers and influencers
- Take the time to understand your operating environment, and to identify opponents and competitors
- Identify both your strengths and your weaknesses
- Clarify your objectives: what exactly do you want to accomplish?
- Define your range of audiences: who exactly do you want to communicate with?
- Document your case; get your facts straight
- Define your key messages
- Identify supporters, both *existing* and *potential*
- Select the most appropriate tactics to achieve your objectives
MAKING AN EARLY START:
While many organizations wait until they have a problem before they make a start on building their community relations, this is almost always a mistake. Once a problem arises, it’s usually already too late. The midst of a crisis is no place to have to begin building your credibility; you need to create a base of support and understanding before you need it.

You can identify most opportunities and risks in advance, so there’s no point in waiting until they become critical before starting to build your profile and win over supporters.

IDENTIFYING THE KEY DECISION MAKERS AND INFLUENCERS:
Few in the industry have the energy or resources needed to tackle the entire community – so it’s important to identify the key decision makers in your area of concern and those who influence their thinking the most. That way, you know where to concentrate your energy.

In government, it’s often relatively easy to see who has the greatest influence over your issues as you can see how responsibility is assigned. In addition to direct assignments such as those for a cabinet minister, there are often joint responsibilities for various policy areas that will tell you who are making the key decisions. It’s not as easy to find out who has indirect influence, but well worth the effort if you want to focus your energies efficiently. It is often easier to get through to such “influencers” that to a busy minister, yet they can exert a strong influence if they have the trust of those in the position of power.

Many decisions in government are made collectively – by groups such as the party caucus or cabinet. This means that you can often influence the direction of their decision-making by having reached a single member of such a group who is prepared to carry your message forward into the discussions.

Don’t forget the importance of community groups in influencing government! Some, such as business organizations, have a very direct impact on government policies and priorities, and if they understand and support your cause can be very helpful in carrying your message forward.
They like legacies (important programs or projects that will be left as a testament to their time in office) and recognition for what they have done.

They like to leverage their investments by having the private sector invest along with them.

They want protection from controversy which could lead to their being associated with negative publicity.

Knowing this makes it much easier to see what kinds of activities they’re most likely to support, and where you can create opportunities that they will appreciate.

As noted above, there is also a direct linkage between government attitudes and those of the communities they want to be seen to be representing, and this too needs to be understood. Governments are very sensitive to community opinion, because this will help them get the support they need at election time. As a result, they generally want to see community support for a concept before they are prepared to act.

In order to communicate effectively, you need to understand the needs and expectations of your key audiences. That way, you can ensure you present information and offer them opportunities that are meaningful to their needs.

Most governments, for example, have a number of things in common:

- An elected government generally wants to get re-elected – so this is a major focus, particularly when elections are imminent.
- They need to be seen as acting in the best interests of their communities, and spending public money wisely.
- They need to be seen as acting on their stated policies, and carrying out the promises they’ve made as government.

In reviewing these, it’s good to remember to make full use of your “natural advantages”, which are those things that you can do more effectively than others and which give you the “edge” over your competition.

In spite of its low profile and lack of a distinct image, the industry has a number of attributes that lend themselves to a profile-building campaign. Among these are:

- The industry tends to be involved with high-profile events which attract public and government attention. This regularly puts members of the industry in a position to interact with industry leaders and local government, and creates unique opportunities to communicate with them.

- The industry has access to facilities and services that allow its members to stage events and activities which would be out of the reach of other interest groups.

- The industry has strong links to areas which are considered very important to government and community development, including scientific, trade and investment, business development, medical, technical and communications. This elevates the role of the industry relative to those such as tourism which is primarily associated with leisure activity.

- Because it is facility based, the industry has the ability to calculate return on investment more precisely than many others. This demonstrates fiscal accountability which is of increasing importance these days.

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SET SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

One of the most important parts of developing a communications strategy is to define exactly what you are trying to achieve. Many of those you will be communicating with don’t have a lot of time or attention to devote to any one issue — so you need to be very precise in what it is you want to say and accomplish.

Is it to build general awareness of what you do and the kinds of benefits you create? Is it to push for a specific program or policy that will support your operation? Is it to encourage greater attention to promoting your city as a meeting destination? Is it to obtain funding for a project, facility renovation or expansion? Each one of these have somewhat different needs in terms of what is to be communicated.

At the same time, recognize what kind of information is needed to support your specific request, and build that in as an introduction to the “ask”. For example, if you are looking for funding, you need first to demonstrate what economic benefits you create and how these will be enhanced by more funding. If you are concerned about the impact a particular policy or practice is having on a specific area of business, you should be prepared to propose a practical solution and show how this would help resolve the problem.

DEFINING AUDIENCES AND ADAPTING TO EACH

Just like defining messages, defining audiences you want and need to reach is an important step. Depending on your circumstances, such groups may include any or all of local or regional government, local industry, trade media, news media, the community at large, the business sector, clients or even professional groups in the community.

An important point is that each “audience” you may want to reach with your message has distinct needs and interests, and tend to “filter” messages accordingly. This means that in order to reach these different audiences with equal effectiveness, you need to adapt your style, content and even language accordingly.

For example, you may decide that your most important target audiences are government, the media, the local business community and the public at large. If so, you will have to adapt your messages into political, factual, economic and community benefit terms to make them most effective.

In deciding which “adaptation” is most appropriate to a general public audience, consider what are the key issues of the day and see how you can relate these to your story. For example, if the state of the economy is the biggest issue, it makes the most sense to stress the business development side of the argument. If health care is a big concern, you may want to stress the role that conventions and conferences play in supporting health research and practice by hosting medical events in the community.
Develop a measure of return on investment for any public investment made in the industry; for example, on meeting facilities or marketing. This will demonstrate that instead of such investments just being spending, they actually generate a return for the community.

Identify and quantify other community benefits. Things like educational, professional development, community profile, creating a showcase for local industry etc. are more difficult to measure precisely, but they are often even more important than the economic measures.

Make a link to the benefits created for other industry sectors. When the business community begins to understand how important conventions and exhibitions are to such things as trade, investment and technology development, they are much more likely to become active supporters.

Ten “positive points”:

1. Meetings are big business in their own right – and play an important role in supporting other businesses
2. Meetings promote investment, trade, communications, technology
3. Meetings bring education and professional development to the local community
4. Meetings are a “clean” industry and promote environmental quality
5. Meetings promote and support other business sectors
6. Meetings represent the “high end” of visitor spending
7. Meetings attract global expertise
8. Meetings create and spread knowledge world-wide
9. Meetings build community profile
10. Meetings promote global understanding and cooperation
related issues, you will be seen as being of much more immediate importance to the community.

> You can also relate your messages to the new global agenda of building better understanding, communications and cooperation amongst people around the world. In the wake of global terrorism and tensions, one of the things that our industry does best is now the biggest issue on earth – bringing different groups together to help build better global relations.

> You can relate them to the concerns that have developed around the global financial crisis and accompanying recession, and the uncertainties of economic recovery. In particular, you can use them to demonstrate that meetings are an essential element in sustaining economic development for the future.

DEFINING YOUR MESSAGES

In presenting these messages, it’s important to relate them to the immediate interests of whoever you’re talking to in order to make them more relevant and “immediate”. Some things to think about in this regard are:

> You can link them to government policies like trade and investment or educational development. Again, when governments see the role that this industry can and does play in supporting their own economic and social development policies, they are much more likely to be supportive.

> You can relate your messages to current public and political concerns. If you are talking about the role you play in things like medical, trade, education or research related issues, you will be seen as being of much more immediate importance to the community.

IDENTIFYING SUPPORTERS

Sometimes, the best story in the world only has credibility if it comes from someone else. That’s where having supporters to speak on your behalf can be extremely important.

Take the time to identify potential supporters and then make the effort to encourage them and provide them with the information they need. Sometimes such supporters may be found within government, where they can speak to other government members directly. Sometimes they can be found within the business community, where there are people who understand the role you play in supporting their business.

An important point is that your biggest potential supporters may not be the most obvious ones – others in the industry, for example. Instead, they may be those who benefit from what you do – but who may not even realize it themselves. Academics, medical practitioners, business interests, research organizations and many other similar business and professional groups may not have made the connection with the meetings industry – but can be persuaded to do so. They often make the best supporters because they bring a “third party” perspective to the discussion.

You may actually want to form associations or alliances with supporters, particularly on specific issues. This is often actually useful for government decision-makers, as they can see directly what the extent of support is for a particular issue instead of having to work it out for themselves. Responding to a group like this is also easier to do, as they know they are dealing with many different interests at the same time. It’s also likely to get them more visibility, which is an important factor in political life.

It’s also important to remember that the higher profile your supporters have, the more useful they can be in advancing your own visibility. For this reason, it’s often very helpful to recruit a prominent individual or individuals to act as a spokesperson or endorse your program. Business, political, literary or entertainment leaders often have their own reasons for feeling positive about what meetings accomplish, and if you can get (and use) their endorsement for your program, it will attract the attention of many people who might not otherwise pay attention.
SELECTING THE MOST APPROPRIATE TACTICS

So now you’ve defined your key audiences; developed your messages; checked your facts and have a story to tell. All these preparations lead up to one thing: a set of tactics for actually carrying out a successful communications campaign in your community. These tactics are simply the best available ways of getting your message out, given your specific needs, opportunities and local conditions. Here are some suggested tactics you might want to consider as you think about what best suits your particular situation;

MOBILIZE THE LOCAL INDUSTRY

The broader the representation of the industry, the more impact you’ll have. Use your regular interactions with other members of the meetings industry in your community to build an industry group that can act together. It may be as simple as organizing a delegation to present your information to government, or as complex as a jointly funded campaign using advertising or creating an industry event.

DEVELOP ALLIANCES

Access is everything – so creating access to your audiences is the first step. To get access, link up with other business groups that have similar interests, make a presentation, get an appointment with the appropriate government officials or use any connections you have to get in front of the right people.

In general, you should target groups with similar interests and objectives. There’s no point in forming a group only to find you’ve created a forum for other, less beneficial issues that will divert attention from your communications objectives.

CARRY OUT AN ANALYSIS OF ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY BENEFITS

In order to tell your story effectively, particularly to governments and the business community, you’ll need the facts about what the industry contributes to your area and how it benefits the community. An economic impact analysis is the most often used vehicle for doing this, as it is typically the way that the importance of various industries are compared.

In doing such an analysis, it is important to gather information on all of the economic benefits that the industry creates, not simply the most obvious ones such as delegate expenditures. Estimation of incremental tax revenues is also an important component as these are of great interest not only to government but also to the community who can see how often it is non-residents who are paying for the services they enjoy.

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DON’T FORGET THE COMMUNITY BENEFITS!

At the same time, such an analysis should not be limited to just economic measures. There are many other benefits arising from the meeting industry that, while we often take them for granted, are actually of more immediate interest to those in our communities and governments. These include such things as promoting research and technology, attracting global expertise in key areas such as medicine and research, building awareness of our cities and regions and creating educational, cultural and training opportunities in our communities.

While these are more difficult to quantify accurately, they should not be neglected in favour of the “hard” economic measures that tend to make up the bulk of our reporting.

WRITE UP YOUR STORY

The single most important step in your communications strategy is to actually put your “story” down on paper. It helps you get your thinking straight and recognize your priorities, forces you to get your facts together and gives you something others can help you evaluate to see if you have good arguments.

Once complete, this can become the basis for everything you do. It can become an article or advertising copy for the media. It can be the content for a presentation to the community or a delegation to government. It can be printed as a brochure or Fact Sheet for distribution to colleagues or community groups. Finally, it can be used as a “creative brief” form use in the when you need others involved in preparing materials for your campaign.
For ease, your “story” can be built around the key messages included in this booklet, adapted to your local conditions and including your own local facts.

ADAPT EXISTING MATERIALS:
There are lots of people in the industry who are regularly preparing materials such as articles and presentations and who are willing to share these for others to adapt for their own purposes. Many such materials are available on the JMIC web site, and JMIC itself regularly prepares and posts timely materials for general industry use. This approach can save a lot of time and energy, as well as help maintain consistent overall messaging.

CREATE A “QUICK FACTS” SHEET FOR EASY ACCESS TO KEY INFORMATION
The depth of detail contained in a report or economic analysis can often be overwhelming for the reader, particularly if they are occupied with other issues as government officials generally are. To increase the likelihood of your information being seen and understood, it’s important to create a condensed version which can be made available to key audiences and anyone likely to become a spokesperson.

INITIATE COMMUNICATIONS WITH YOUR LOCAL MEDIA
The basic choices here are paid vs. unpaid coverage. Getting unpaid coverage means being “newsworthy”, either by providing news items or feature information of editorial interest. Paid media such as advertisements or paid editorial (advertorial) costs you money but gives you complete control over the message and advertorial rates are often much less than full ad rates, particularly if the information is of “community interest”.

If you have a particular item of overall, ongoing community interest, you may want to consider meeting with the editorial boards of your local media. These are the groups who decide how an issue will be covered and they are often available for presentations.

RUN AN ADVERTISEMENT OR “ADVERTORIAL” IN YOUR LOCAL MEDIA
While press releases and interviews are subject to interpretation by reporters, advertisements which you place yourself are not (can use an “occasion” such as meetings week to justify placing an ad). There are more details about this kind of activity in the section entitled “Being the Media” below.

SHARE THE EXPERIENCE WITH THE COMMUNITY
One of the best ways to communicate what we’re all about is to share the experiences we all take for granted with those who may have little opportunity to participate in these kinds of events. For a community or business group this may involve organizing an event that incorporates many of the elements of a convention or exhibition and opening it up to the public. For local government, it may involve inviting them to participate in an actual event by delivering a welcome address or joining delegates for a banquet.

These kinds of activities typically involve “putting your advantages to work” as few other industry sectors have either the opportunities or the facilities to enable them to share the experience as we do.

USE INFORMATION STRATEGICALLY
Information, as they say, is power, and those of us in the events business generally have lots of information that we fail to use strategically. You can use information about upcoming events and access to the people involved with them to help improve your position in a number of ways:

CREATE A DELEGATION
There are many opportunities to present your information in a formal way to local government. One of the easiest is to assemble an industry group and make a presentation to the most appropriate part of government; this may be a mayor and council; a Minister responsible, a party caucus or any number of other groups depending on your political situation.
Such presentations are generally welcomed provided that you offer some time flexibility and have something useful to communicate. In fact, such bodies are often delighted to be meeting with a group that is not bringing them a problem, and there is therefore a better opportunity to provide background information in a more comfortable setting.

**CREATE POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES**

As an industry, we are in a unique position to create “profile” opportunities for local politicians, often simply by arranging to have them present for high-visibility events or to be seen with important guests. These kinds of efforts generally work for everyone: the politicians get their profile; they, in turn, lend extra attention to the event and those associated with it and if it is a success, they will generally be grateful for the opportunity.

At the same time, such occasions are good for relationship building and often also provide a chance to have a discussion of issues important to the industry story.

**PREPARE A PRESENTATION AND TAKE IT TO COMMUNITY GROUPS**

Almost every community organization has a regular schedule of meetings and almost all welcome a feature speaker who can provide useful information on topics of interest to their members. Because so few people understand much about how the meetings, convention and exhibition sector works, this topic is a natural for opportunities such as this.

One presentation, well prepared, can provide the basis for many such events. But don’t forget to adapt it a bit to the specific interests of each group if you want to have the greatest impact!

**CREATE AN “OCCASION”**

Often, important messages fail to get delivered simply because there is no time that seems best. That’s why many organizations create a commemorative “day” or “week” to feature their story. Such an occasion serves to focus attention, both in the community and amongst those associated with it and if it is a success, they will generally be grateful for the opportunity.

At the same time, such occasions are good for relationship building and often also provide a chance to have a discussion of issues important to the industry story.

**ARRANGE TO HAVE OTHERS SPEAK ON YOUR BEHALF – AND MAKE SURE YOU DO THE SAME FOR THEM!**

As already mentioned, sometimes it is most effective to have someone else presenting your story. They will appear to be less biased and often bring the credibility of other recognized groups to your support. When making presentations or placing media information, always make an effort to include some kind of participation from such groups.

At the same time, make sure you speak up for other such groups who need your support. It will not only earn their gratitude but help you to raise your own profile even further without appearing “self-serving”.

**GET AN “ENDORSEMENT”**

As stated above, recruiting a prominent individual or group of individuals to endorse your program and / or act as a spokesperson can increase your overall visibility enormously. Political, business, entertainment or other leaders can often be persuaded to provide such an endorsement and even to act as a spokesperson at events or in editorial materials prepared to carry your message.

**EXPLORE THE POTENTIAL FOR THE USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING:**

Social networking is a rapidly developing phenomenon that is still evolving as a vehicle for targeted communications. However, it has many different elements that are powerful devices in shaping opinions and creating attention around both local and global issues. Many social networking vehicles are already heavily utilized in the structure of meetings and conventions themselves and this will only increase in the future due to the opportunities they offer for the rapid dissemination of information that can at the same time be targeted to members of special interest groups.

However, protocols and permissions are still evolving which means how such vehicles are used for things like industry promotion can be a sensitive area. Expertise should be sought by organizations moving in this direction to ensure that communications efforts are seen as both relevant and appropriate in this particular context, and most industry organizations are including sessions on this topic in their programs. But overall, the actual content of the messaging for this area is largely as for any other media. In particular, what individuals communicate to their networks about their own work and the outcomes they see it generate will always be an acceptable message amongst peer groups.
Produce a regular bulletin of upcoming events or activities in the meetings / convention / exhibition area. While each event will have its own unique features and benefits, it is also an opportunity to repeat and reinforce the key messages about what the industry does overall for the community.

Schedule an annual event so that you are generating attention on a regular basis every year.

Produce a regular advisory to government on events or activities that would be of particular interest to them. For example, if there are events that relate specifically to a particular ministry, they should be advised of these any opportunities to participate.

Attend regularly scheduled meetings to provide a report on what’s going on in the industry. Most business groups, such as a chamber of commerce, have such regular meetings and by attending consistently you can often become an ongoing part of the agenda.

The best campaigns are those that recognize that communications, particularly with your own community and governments, is a long term commitment. Too many people fail with an otherwise good communications effort because they see it as a “one-shot” exercise and having carried it out, go on to other things and ignore the need to follow up and reinforce the messages that have been delivered. They become “yesterday’s news” to the community, who move on to other issues of more immediate importance.

We are fortunate in that ours is an industry where new things are happening all the time. Each event we’re involved with has another whole set of facts associated with it and provides a new example of the key messages we’re trying to make. The key is simply to see the communications process as an ongoing one, and to utilize new information as it comes along.

Some easy ways to ensure that there is follow-up as a regular reminder to your community and governments are:

Additional Resources and Links will be regularly added to the JMIC website at www.themeetingsindustry.org
HERE’S A MEETINGS INDUSTRY WEEK CALENDAR WITH A FULL SET OF ACTIVITIES THAT WOULD PROFILE YOUR INDUSTRY TO MOST OF THE KEY AUDIENCES IDENTIFIED ABOVE:

**MONDAY**
An industry advertisement or “special section” appears in your local newspaper. This piece outlines the importance of the industry to the community, identifies the different organizations and businesses that participate in the meetings industry in your community and the various ways that the industry benefits the community (see sample ad in the appendices). It also indicates what activities will be taking place over the rest of the week.

**TUESDAY**
You lead an industry “delegation” to meet with key local officials and media, and present each with a presentation about the industry and its role in the community (a sample framework for such a presentation is also included in the appendices). Amongst the groups you should consider visiting would be:
1. Your Mayor and / or City Council
2. Your Governor’s office or other appropriate regional government
3. The editorial board of your local news media

**WEDNESDAY**
You make a presentation to your local Chamber of Commerce or other community business organization. Emphasize the role that the meetings industry plays in promoting local trade and investment as well as providing more exposure for your city and region. Identify ways in which the local business community can get more involved by supporting industry initiatives or helping to identify new events that could be brought into the city.

**THURSDAY**
You carry out a series of interviews with local media on a topic of community importance related to the meetings industry. Relate these to topics of local importance, such as economic development, employment, increasing tourism traffic, or creating a stage for important issues such as health care, technology, education and culture.

**FRIDAY**
You host a “showcase” event at your local convention centre or other meetings facility. Invite members of the local industry as well as key government, business and community leaders. Invite a newsworthy speaker to make a presentation that will attract media attention or make an announcement about a program, initiative or research result that will be of interest to the community. Create a “platform” for political leaders to make a statement about the industry.

Sound demanding? Not really. Whether you do some or all of the suggested program, it makes a start to building your local profile and any of these activities could easily be carried out with a bit of preparation ahead of time and some follow up after to ensure their success.
A MEETINGS INDUSTRY WEEK “SCENARIO”:

SOME ADVANCE PREPARATIONS:

1. Before meetings industry week, call a meeting of representatives of your local meetings groups. These might include the convention centre or other convention venue; local PCO or destination management companies, etc. Discuss the issues and opportunities that are of particular importance to your area and what messages you’d most like to communicate to decision-makers.

2. Document your objectives, messages and key information (economic figures, industry benefits etc. and distribute them to your local industry group. Encourage everyone to get involved and assign responsibilities for particular aspects of the program (i.e., organizing the delegation, preparing print or presentation materials, organizing the local industry event).

3. Develop required materials. These might include an industry “fact sheet”, a presentation or media articles. Often, this can be done by simply adapting existing materials (samples of most of these are attached in the appendices) by adding local facts and figures and identifying local issues.

4. Communicate with your local media and tell them that Meetings Industry Week is coming up; what it means and what you intend to do about it. Provide them with your key messages and explore how they might work with you to provide greater coverage, either through articles or by placing a cooperative industry advertisement.

5. Get appointments to make a presentation to key government or community groups during this period. Often, such meetings will have to be booked well in advance and will depend on whether government is meeting during this period.

6. Explore the possibility of having a “Meetings Industry Week” declared in your community. This can often be done through having the office of the mayor or governor declare such a week, and it can be used in all community activities that you decide to do.

WHAT YOU DO TO FOLLOW UP YOUR “MEETINGS WEEK” PROGRAM CAN BE AS IMPORTANT AS WHAT YOU DO DURING THE ACTUAL WEEK ITSELF. MAKE SURE YOU REMEMBER TO:

AFTER YOUR “MEETINGS WEEK”:

1. Send letters of thanks to all those you meet with, reminding them of your key messages and offering to answer any further questions they may have in the future. If there any “reminders” of the event (such as photographs, documents etc.) this is a good time to pass these along as well. Remember to provide any additional information that was either requested or referred to during your meeting.

2. Issue a press release identifying what happened during Meetings Week and referencing anything of importance that may have been said by a feature speaker or government official.

3. Consider issuing a monthly update to those groups you met with (government, media, community) in order to establish an ongoing communication with them.

This will be the best time to do this (as you’re still fresh in their minds) and could consist of something as simple as a listing of recent or upcoming events with a reminder of the economic and community benefits associated with each.

4. Let your industry colleagues know what you’ve done! The more you spread the word about your activities and successes, the more such activity we’ll get happening and the greater overall impact we’ll have as an industry. JMIC will be creating a number of opportunities to do this, from a website for information exchange to a special award offered each year to recognize achievements by industry members in increasing community awareness.

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Carrying out most of the tactics suggested above require nothing but common sense, a commitment of some time, and a good sense of what it is you want to say. However, a more ambitious program will also require some specific communications “tools” that you or your staff may or may not be familiar with. Learning about such tools may be a good investment because they will help you not only with a program such as this but with your other business activities as well.

**OPINION POLLS**

As said before, information is power—and often there is no better information than knowing what the community thinks of you and the benefits you attract to your city or region. This can be a powerful way of communicating to government about the importance people place on the role you play in the community, and can be captured through surveys conducted amongst target groups. At the least, they will give you insights into what the current level of awareness is, and what needs to be done to improve your overall image.

However, such surveys need to be approached with caution as they may also create other issues. Some of the things to keep in mind when doing a public opinion poll are:

> You can’t assume any level of awareness or understanding amongst your audience—so you need to shape questions accordingly. Sometimes, you’ll even need to provide information as part of the survey and have respondents react to that information. Survey companies can help you design questionnaires that do this.

> The results are sensitive to recent events that are on people’s minds. For example, if there have been recent problems with government finances you may get a negative reaction to any questions re: funding.

> As much as we hope people will recognize the importance of our work, you need to anticipate the possibility of a negative response and have a strategy to deal with that. Often, simply a lack of knowledge about a particular topic can produce a negative result, even if people are not actually opposed to your activities, and in most areas, the meetings industry is not well known.

> Something to keep in mind is the fact that survey results can be most effective before they are released to the media or public. This is because government typically likes to be aware of a situation before it “breaks” so they can anticipate how they will respond. For example, if you get results showing strong public support for an initiative it may be best to share them with government first so they can be seen to support a popular action before the extent of public support is generally known.
For all these reasons, media relations is an important skill and one worth investing some time and energy in developing. There are many excellent resources available to help you do this; in the meantime, here are some of the most useful things to remember in dealing with the media:

- You need to deal with the media in an organized way: as an organization, you must have a plan and a referral process for handling media inquiries so that they are dealt with consistently and by the right person.

- A key part of this process is to appoint a spokesperson that is responsible for media relations and refer all inquiries to that person or their designate. This will ensure consistency of response and ensure that the person responding actually has the authority to speak on behalf of the organization.

- When responding to a media inquiry yourself, take time to prepare your response, assemble the relevant facts and get any background you may require on the situation in question. Find out what the reporters deadline is so you know how much time you have without creating problems for them.

- Have your own agenda and messages in mind when you do an interview. Don’t simply respond to the questions as they are put to you but look for opportunities to insert information that you would like to communicate. Think of the interview as an opportunity to make your own “positive points” rather than just an exercise in survival!

- Always remember that you control the content with what you say: if you don’t want it reported, don’t say it! An interview is not a conversation; it is “on the record” unless otherwise agreed, and most people who claim to have been misquoted generally find that they actually did say things that they wish hadn’t been reported.

- Don’t invent, improvise or speculate about information — it’s completely acceptable to say you don’t have the answer, but you’ll try to get the information that’s needed. Always remember that speculation, particularly about others, is dangerous ground.

- If you do promise additional information, remember to follow up promptly. Reporters have deadlines, and appreciate it when you respect them. On the other hand, if you don’t supply the information, someone else may do it for you or worse, the reporter themselves may speculate on what it might have been.

- Contact others in your organization or other groups that may be contacted as well so that they know:
  - That an inquiry was made
  - What you told the reporter, and
  - If you directed the reporter to any other sources of information

This will help ensure consistency and give others time to prepare.

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Information is power – there is no better information than knowing what the community thinks of you...

BEING THE MEDIA

Sometimes the best way to get accurate and positive media coverage is not to work through the media via press coverage but to actually be the media by placing advertisements that carry the same information. While this introduces a cost element, it also provides a number of benefits including:

- You get to initiate media contact when it’s appropriate to your own schedule rather than when the media deem the time is right for coverage.
- Selective advertising reaches the same audiences – those who read editorial are also exposed to advertising at the same time. In placing ads appropriately, you'll reach both community and government audiences in the same way you would with editorial coverage.

- “Advertorial” formats mimic editorial content – they are designed to look more informational than editorial and can be used to convey a factual rather than promotional quality.
- Many print media – particularly local community media – will cooperate on news supplements or “special sections” that feature a specific topic. Often they will also offer discounted advertising rates, particularly if these have information of community interest. It may be possible to get a number of meetings-related businesses to cooperate in funding this kind of feature as part of a special occasion like Meetings Industry Week.

SUPPORT YOUR ASSOCIATIONS!

There’s one more thing we all can do to improve our position in the global economy – and that’s to support our associations that act as a collective voice for the industry.

Industry associations represent a very efficient way for decision makers to communicate with the industry as a whole. In addition, they often have greater credibility since they are seen to offer a wider perspective on any given situation.

The work we do in our own communities takes on another whole level of importance when it is drawn together and communicated by those who represent the industry as a whole. Your associations can work with senior governments, trade media and international trade events to give extra prominence to the actions you’re taking at the community level – and help create a better working environment for us all!

IT DOESN’T HAPPEN OVERNIGHT

Like most things, achieving your community and government relations objectives won’t happen from a single effort but requires regular, ongoing activities to deliver results. However, well-timed activities can have dramatic effects.

As well as your short-term objectives, you should keep in mind your longer term aspirations – a different way for your local government to fund or support the meetings business, for example, or some form of ongoing relationship with the community. In a number of areas, successful communications campaigns have led directly to new programs and structures that have created a stronger and more stable base for the industry.

However, every bit of increased awareness helps – as you’ll find out when you start to raise your profile and find people are more aware of what you do and how it benefits the community!

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As referenced earlier in this guide, it is essential to have a list of key messages or “Positive Points” in mind in order to have the raw materials necessary to shape an argument or communicate with your chosen audiences. The following are a more detailed listing of the kinds of messages that have been successful in communicating the importance of the industry and may be of some use in developing your own materials. As always, they should be adapted to what you know about your target audience and adapted to include local information that will be of greatest interest.

THE BENEFITS:

1. Meetings and conventions generate uniquely high–yield economic benefits and attract influential visitors:

   > The average daily expenditures of meeting delegates far exceed those of leisure visitors. In most cases, this is by a factor of between two and three times what is generated by leisure travelers. This means that for any given investment, the absolute return from delegates is much higher than for a comparable number of leisure visitors. There are a number of reasons for this, including:
   
   > The economic benefits associated with meetings and conventions go well beyond the expenditures of individual delegates. There are also the production costs associated with staging the event and providing food and beverage, entertainment and other components of the overall meeting experience which are paid for by event organizers from registration fees.

   > In addition, there are also the considerable expenditures by exhibitors who typically accompany conventions in order to access delegates and who generally have higher levels of event-related spending than delegates.

   > Participants in meetings and conventions are typically much more affluent than other visitors and their travel expenses may be subsidized as business / professional expenses.

...it is essential to have a list of key messages or “Positive Points” in mind in order to have the raw materials necessary to shape an argument.
The economic benefits of meetings and conventions are widely dispersed amongst many sectors, ranging from obvious areas such as transportation and accommodation to indirect beneficiaries such as retail, restaurants, attractions and entertainment. In addition, there are significant impacts associated with event production (display, audio-visual, translation) and services (food and beverage, freight management, communications, and customs clearance).

Delegates are also more likely to offer broader benefits to a community because they are typically attending for business and professional purposes and are therefore more likely to have potential interest in business development and investment opportunities. At the same time, they are likely those who would not otherwise be attracted to a particular region were it not for their participation in the event itself, and can be a vehicle for disseminating information about the destination to other similar audiences.

Meetings generate a wide variety of other economic and community benefits. These are diverse, and address those areas which are critical to the business, scientific, professional, educational and cultural life and development of a community.

Meetings attract investment by attracting an often influential audience of participants, and creating opportunities for showcasing local products, services, and investment opportunities;

Meetings enhance professional development by bringing regional and international expertise into the community where it is accessible to local professionals. This professional enhancement inevitably becomes a benefit to the overall community though improved knowledge and skills.

Meetings enhance science and technology. Apart from generating new forms of technology itself and improving understanding and access to it, they help improve local knowledge and skills by bringing outside information and technology into the host community and providing a vehicle for local businesses and professionals to access the latest developments in their respective fields.

Meetings promote cultural exchange by providing new forums for cultural exchange and new opportunities to expose local culture to national and international audiences. Due to the nature of the meeting experience, the quality of these opportunities is seldom available to other kinds of visitors.

Meetings are an integral part of the economic development process, which is a critical role in times of economic recovery. Conferences, conventions and exhibitions all play key roles in product development and marketing, R&D, innovation and new investment, all of which are critical to driving the economy at local, regional and global levels.

Meetings and conventions generate incremental tourism by:

- attracting visitors who would be unlikely to visit a destination otherwise
- creating new forms of destination exposure through the promotional activities surrounding an event, and
- encouraging pre and post event travel. The greater distance a delegate travels, the more likely they are to engage in these kinds of activities and the longer they tend to stay.

Meetings and conventions promote the profile of a city or region and its role in national and international affairs.

They create a greater sense of presence and prestige for an area though associating it with international events and figures. At the same time, they generate a new audience for destination promotion through cooperative attendance-building efforts with event organizers. Attendees are also likely to communicate their appreciation for a destination to their peers, which can enhance future visitation potential. In essence, a major convention creates a new sales force for a destination.

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...meetings and conventions build networks that link people from different countries for common purposes.

5. Meetings are directly connected to the key issues of the day.

Meetings, conventions and exhibitions are important forums and a key part of the solution to many of the most important international issues of the day. They are vehicles for international trade development at a time of economic crisis. They are the way that international health issues and crises get resolved. They are a way to achieve agreement on important policy decisions. Overall, they are pivotal factors in global development and international relations, and an important part of the way that global development and coordination takes place to the benefit of everyone.

6. Meetings directly address concerns about economic isolationism.

One of the greatest issues in the global economic recovery process is the prospect of protectionism by individual countries or regions. Meetings and conventions are the antithesis of this tendency as they exist to bring together people from different jurisdictions to address issues and opportunities of common interest, and build networks that link people from different countries for common purposes.

7. Meetings play an important role in building better understanding amongst different groups and countries throughout the world.

Meetings and conventions are at root a vehicle for bringing together people from many different cultures and geographic areas to exchange information of issues and disciplines of common interest. They are, therefore, a critical element for building global understanding, acceptance and cooperation which eventually leads to a more secure world.

THE CHALLENGES:

1. The meetings business is highly competitive, as the benefits are recognized and pursued by regions and communities throughout the world.

2. As a result, there is a need for an ongoing commitment to facilities, technology and service in any given community in order to for the industry to survive in the market. In an increasingly competitive global market, with rising levels of expectation, only those who can deliver to the highest standards will prosper.

3. Because meetings are logistically complex, they are highly sensitive to many areas affected by government policy including ease of access, security measures, transportation issues and taxation levels. The industry is therefore uniquely vulnerable to government measures undertaken for completely different reasons.

4. In addition to good facilities, meetings also rely on a positive, relevant and well promoted destination image in order to attract business. That image must relate to the priorities that planners apply to their decision process, which may be quite different from those of other travelers. Increasingly, it must effectively address the business, professional and academic interests of event organizers rather than leisure attractions.

5. There is an increasing interest and concern around the need to measure the value associated with meetings, for several reasons:

   > From a delegate perspective, to justify the investment of time and resources required to attend
   > From a corporate perspective, to confirm a ROI that is increasingly required to rationalize organizing and/or participating in events
   > From a destination perspective, to document the value achieved through building and operating facilities
   > From a sustainability perspective, to demonstrate the beneficial outcomes and business efficiencies that justify the travel-related impacts

As a result of all these factors, any destination, corporation or organization that wishes to participate in the industry must be prepared to address global standards and expectations and to invest in ongoing improvement to remain relevant and competitive.
economic development and the meetings industry

The recent global financial crisis has drawn into focus the important role that activities like meetings, conventions and exhibitions play in supporting and advancing economic development and recovery. However, at the same time, the industry has in some parts of the world had to endure unprecedented scrutiny and criticism by those who have questioned their value and even significance in a time of economic crisis. This situation underlines the challenges that remain for the industry in terms of explaining its role and distinguishing its activities and outcomes from leisure-related travel. In addition to the above, there are therefore an additional set of arguments that can and need to be made with respect to the role of meetings as important vehicles for economic development and recovery.

As history has demonstrated repeatedly that the economy is cyclical, it can be expected that even when economic recovery is well underway, it carries the potential for future downturns and the challenges that will again accompany them. This creates an important opportunity for the Meetings Industry to demonstrate value in anticipation of future challenges to its role.
Meetings build bridges and enhance communications in the face of economic and professional challenges.

While crisis situations often prompt isolation, which in turn inhibits recovery, meetings represent gatherings of individuals and organizations whose collective influence and expertise can maintain the flow of information and business activity. This effect is important at everything from a personal to a global level of interaction.

Meetings are vehicles for retraining, upgrading and transferring skills at a time when this is critical to redeployment of the workforce.

Economic downturns are generally times of dislocation with significant impacts in employment patterns – in fact, it is claimed that jobs lost in a recession seldom return in the same form post-recession. Through their critical role in education, knowledge transfer and professional development, meetings are at the forefront of reshaping the workforce at all levels.

Meetings facilitate change:

It is not only the workforce that changes as a result of an economic downturn – processes and priorities also shift as governments, corporations and professions search for new ways to carry out their responsibilities in a more challenging environment. Through their unique ability to offer both information and face to face communications, meetings typically are powerful tools for facilitating change, increasing efficiencies and assisting in the transitions that are part of the recovery process.

Meetings help restore confidence:

One of the first casualties of a recession is confidence – whether at a personal local, regional or even global level. By providing vehicles for individuals and institutions to share experiences and explore solutions, meetings provide a platform to take action and move ahead. In doing so, they help generate the confidence that is essential to recovery.

Meetings support tourism infrastructure:

Recessions are typically times of reduction in discretionary spending – and that includes leisure travel. Various studies have shown that meetings and other business events account for an increasing proportion of travel-related activity during and after a recession because people are more likely to travel for business purposes than as a purely recreational activity. This support enhances the ability of hospitality infrastructure to survive recessionary periods and bridge a period of recovery.

Meetings promote global cooperation and understanding:

Today’s economy is increasingly global – and meetings are primary vehicles for promoting the kind of interactions required to maintain international cooperation and understanding. By bringing together people from different cultures and disciplines, they create a means for people and institutions from all over the world to interact directly, thus promoting long term relationships that can facilitate business and professional development at a global level.

Additional Resources and Links will be regularly added to the JMIC website at www.themeetingsindustry.org
There are many different industry organizations generating resources in the form of research articles, presentations, campaigns and communications tools. At the same time, there are case studies being developed from a growing number of destinations that are engaging in their own versions of industry promotional activities. No list can ever be entirely up to date – so we would encourage you to check on our web site www.themeetingsindustry.org for an evolving list of materials and ideas. We would also ask that you consider adding your own materials and stories for the use of others as our site is now configured to allow additions in the appropriate categories.