



# SNAPSHOT REPORT

Incentive Travel & Motivational Events

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This Snapshot Report is brought to you by SITE,  
with generous support from Hilton.

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## Welcome

Quick as a flash, SITE is proud to unveil a new snapshot report to share out and reflect back what's top of mind for today's incentive travel and motivational event architects, working directly in companies and corporations.

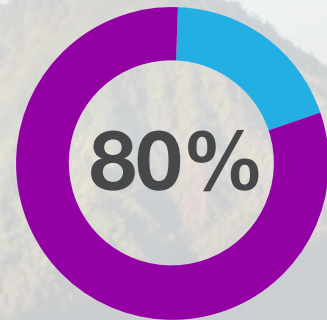
This research reflects the experienced attitudes and opinions of nearly 100 global corporate event organizers, collectively responsible for delivering hundreds of events each year and managing millions of dollars in annual budgets.

As SITE continues to grow its network of incentive travel end-users, and with strategic partners like Hilton continuously working to offer elevated experiences for their event clients, understanding the corporate planner landscape is a crucial part of unlocking business success.

We invite you to dive in, explore our findings, and deliberate the questions they raise with your team — before letting us know what in the world you want SITE and its supporters to capture next!

Number of respondents:

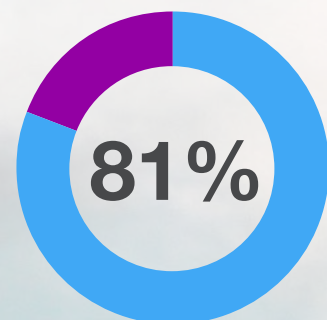
79



have over **10 years**  
of experience

24%

report directly to  
a CEO / Managing  
Director



find trade shows  
like IMEX / IBTM the  
best way to make new  
connections

## A note from SITE

Welcome to the latest industry report from the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE). The Incentive Travel & Motivational Events study contributes to SITE's significant body of research into the nature, purpose and direction of incentive travel, drawing directly, for this report, on submissions from corporations and companies who use incentive travel as a key element in their reward and recognition programs.

In an industry that evolves rapidly, staying informed with up-to-date research is vital for effective business planning and strategic decision-making. This report gathers insights from nearly 100 global event professionals, offering a valuable perspective on current trends and practices as well as a compelling demographic profile of the corporate event planner.

At SITE, we are dedicated to providing the industry with ongoing, valid research and surveys to support your efforts in delivering exceptional incentive travel experiences. Our collaboration with strategic partners like Hilton underscores our commitment to elevating industry standards and enhancing client experiences.

We encourage you to delve into our findings and consider how they can inform your strategies and operations. Your input is essential in helping us tailor future research to meet the needs of our community.

Thank you for your continued support and engagement.

Best regards,



**Benoit Sauvage**  
DMCP, CMP Fellow, CIS, CITP  
Chair, SITE Research & Content Committee

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# A note from Hilton

At Hilton, we are deeply committed to the incentive travel sector, recognizing its critical role in driving motivation, performance, and business success for corporations all over the world. For this reason, we're delighted to support this research initiative from SITE, which targets end-user corporate planners of incentive travel programs.

Supporting actionable research is a cornerstone of our commitment to the incentive travel industry. We believe that informed, data-driven insights are essential for strategic decision-making and planning.

This report provides a comprehensive view of current trends, challenges and opportunities as seen by nearly 100 global event professionals.

We hope you find this research valuable and insightful as you navigate the ever-evolving landscape of incentive travel. Your success is our priority, and we are here to support you with the resources and knowledge you need to excel.

Thank you for your dedication to creating exceptional incentive experiences.

Warm regards,



**Kimberly G. Napolitano**

Executive Director, Industry Relations  
& Intermediary Group Sales,  
Hilton Worldwide Sales

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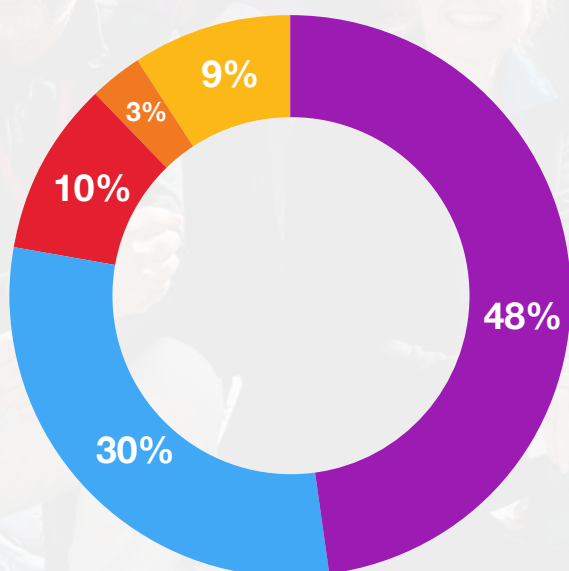
# Our Research Pool

Zooming in on our survey-takers, the views in this snapshot report are based on answers from 79 global incentive travel and motivational event planners working on a full-time basis in corporations.

This group is almost entirely made up of end-users: planners employed directly by companies using incentive travel and/or motivational events as part of their reward and recognition schemes. We've used the phrase

"incentive events" as shorthand throughout the report, to refer to the kinds of events these industry experts are responsible for delivering – both incentive travel experiences and standalone motivational events.

And experts they are, with 80 percent of respondents bringing with them 10+ years of industry experience; in fact, 50 percent have spent 20+ years in the incentive event industry.

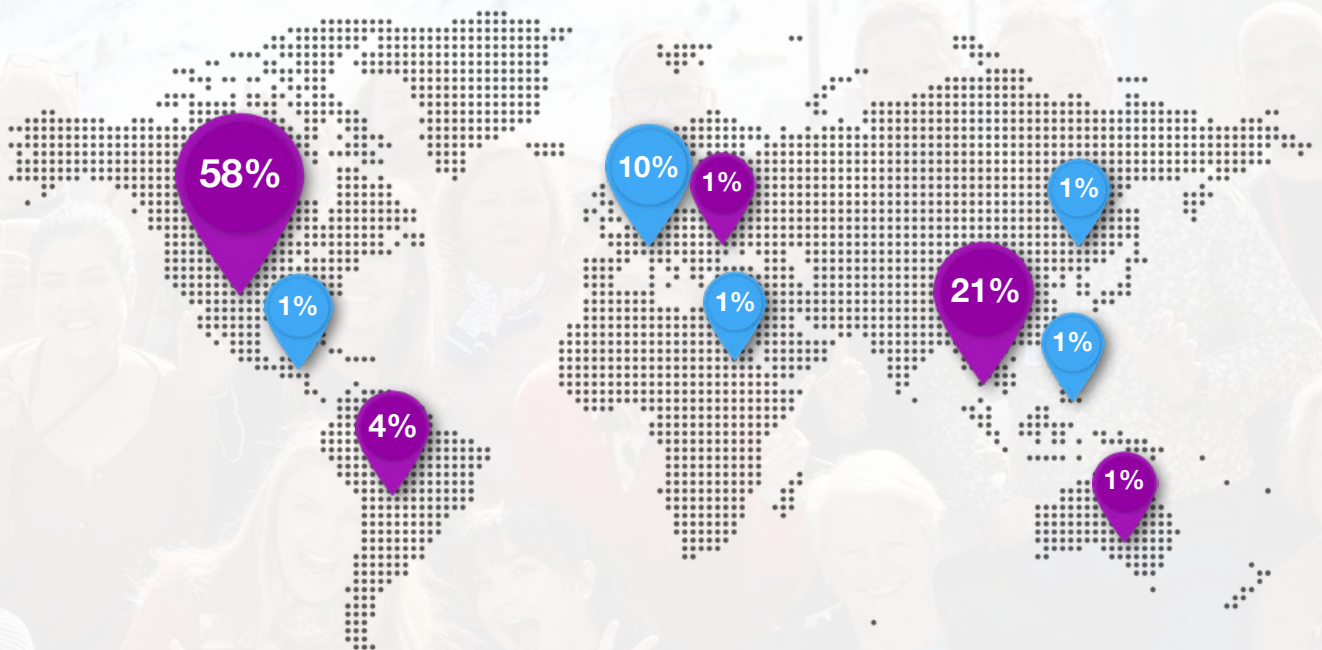


## Industry experience

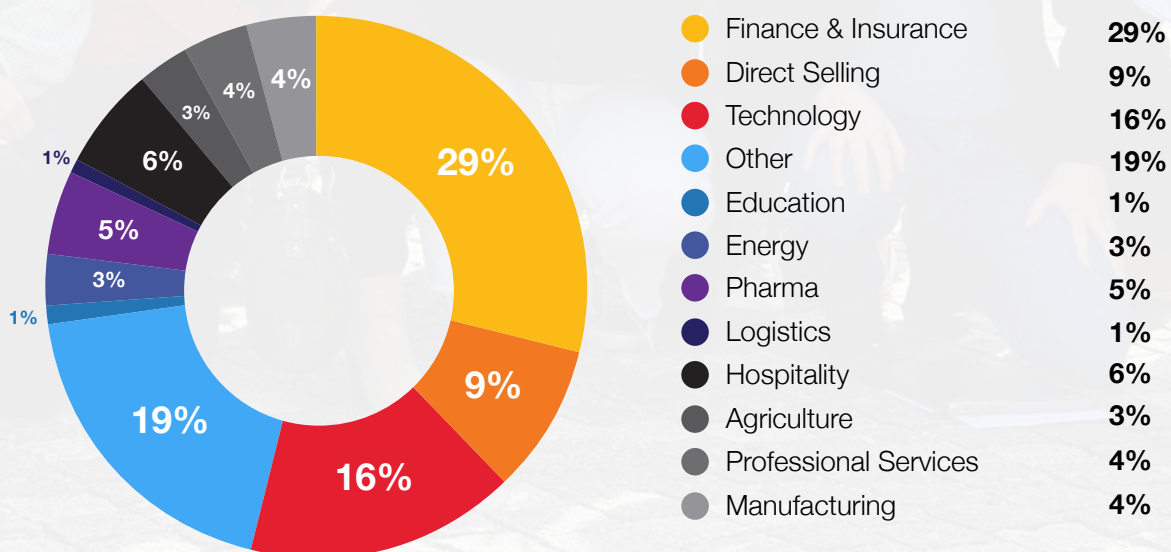
- More than 20 years
- 10 - 20 years
- 6 - 10 years
- 3 - 5 years
- Less than 3 years



The planners we surveyed also come from all over the world, and represent a range of different corporate sectors.



## Industry vertical







# Finding #1:

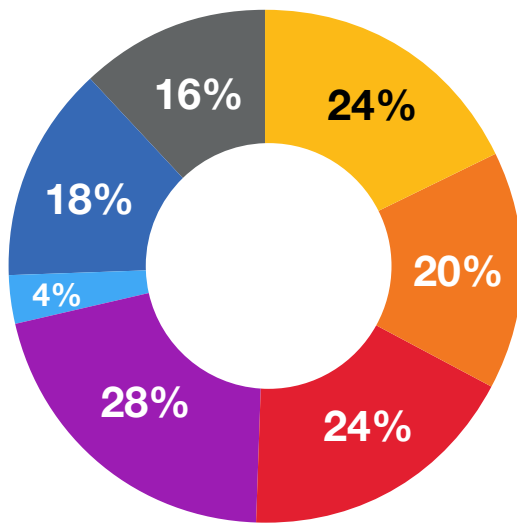
## How do you get here?

***The educational road map to becoming a senior incentive event planner features many twists and turns, rather than one direct route.***

Nearly one-quarter of respondents shared that any formal courses of study or higher education they've pursued has no connection to their current role.

Instead, the planners we surveyed studied a broad range of subjects; some that might be more expected like marketing & communications or commerce & business — and others that are perhaps more unexpected but no less enlightening, like the humanities, languages, and history.





## Qualifications

- No connection with current role
- Business Events Certification
- Commerce, Law, Business
- MarCom
- HR
- Travel, Tourism, Event Mgmt
- Humanities - Languages, History

One-fifth of this group also indicated they have an industry-specific credential like a CIS, CITEP, or CMP. These certifications present strong alternative paths to refreshing knowledge and staying up-to-date on industry trends — and offer chances to specialize in specific disciplines within business tourism, too.

### Checking in:



- What skills are essential for corporate planners to enter a role with?
- How can industry or association certifications complement a formal degree?
- Will global higher education trends impact hospitality career readiness?

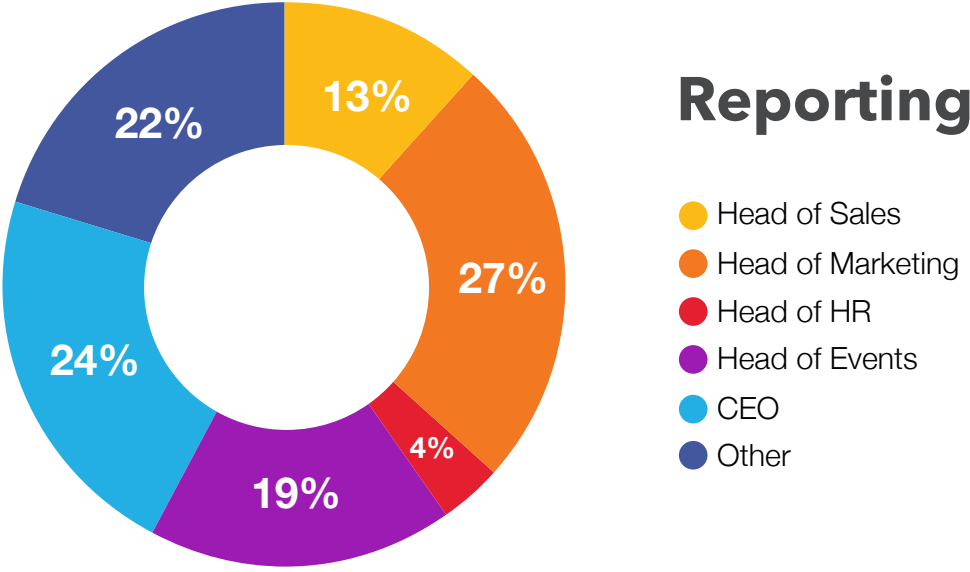
## Finding #2:

### Who influences company & program decisions?

***Who corporate incentive planners report to varies — with verticals like sales, marketing, and CEOs themselves all potentially playing crucial roles.***

When asked who they primarily report to, 27 percent of planners indicated they align with the head of marketing in their organization. Coming in second, interestingly, were the 24 percent of respondents who said they report directly to their company's CEO. This indicates, perhaps, how mission critical incentive events are for companies.

Those responding "other" said they report their company's owner, the chief revenue officer, PR bosses, or the head of partnerships.



Responses here suggest that incentive events continue to cross functions and serve multiple purposes for an organization — especially as top leaders reaffirm the powerful returns of bringing team members together face-to-face.

### Checking in:



- Are incentive travel and motivational events a better sales tool, or marketing tool?
- How do you get the best possible event buy-in from a CEO or other C-suite leader?
- What cross-functional collaborations lead to the best ROI for events?



## Finding #3:

### What are must-haves, and must-avoids, for motivational events?

***Both health & safety and equitable practices within destinations are rising in the ranks of what planners consider when seeking event locales.***

Planners were asked to assign a value of 1-10 (with 1 indicating the factor is not at all important to them, and 10 being a must-have or must-feature) to eight different criteria influencing destination selection.

“Destination appeal” and “infrastructure” came out on top, as industry veterans might well expect. Virtually tied however were “connectivity” — another typical factor that’s long-influenced destination selection trends — and “safety, health, and security”: a priority that continues to take on increased importance and urgency for planners.

## Destination selection criteria rankings



When asked about absolute requirements for incentive event destinations, the most popular must-haves were proof that everyone will be treated equally, and the need for luxury 5 star accommodations.



### Checking in:



- Does the incentive travel industry need to re-examine the relationship between “authenticity” and “luxury”?
- What does the incentive travel and motivational event industry need to challenge stakeholders on?
- Given global concerns around climate change, is it surprising to find “sustainability” in last position when it comes to destination selection?



## Finding #4:

### What suppliers are planners partnering with?

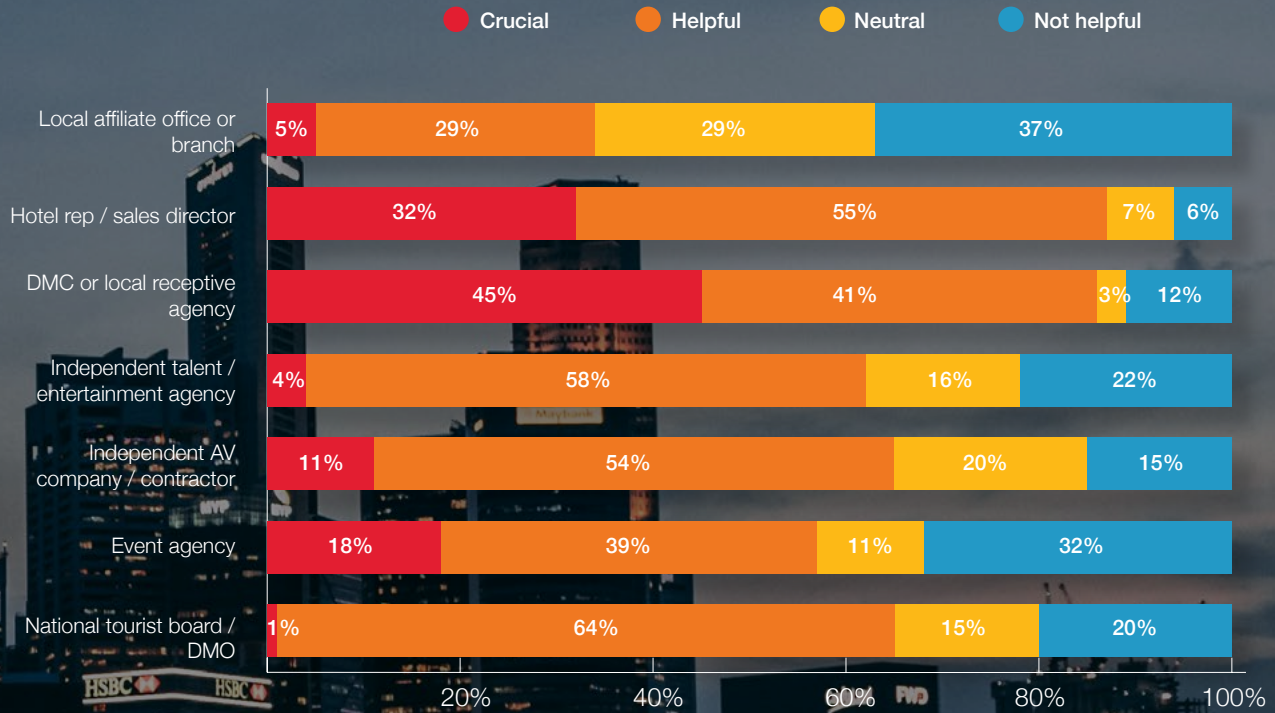
***Movers and shakers within the wider tourism and hospitality ecosystem — especially DMCs and hotel partners — are proving better allies for planners than company affiliates or local office contacts.***

DMCs and hotel reps/sales directors are clear preferred partners for the planners we surveyed.

Other supplier partners like talent & entertainment agencies and AV contractors fall more mid-table in terms of considered importance, with even more mixed favorability for a company's local affiliate offices.



## Attitudes toward supplier partners



### Checking in:



- How can hotels serve as a better bridge or link between different incentive event stakeholders?
- Which partners are best positioned to champion sustainability activities and initiatives?
- Should DMOs in incentive-ready destinations rethink their strategic focus and resources?



A tropical scene with lush green palm trees and dense foliage. In the center, a calm river or lagoon reflects the sky. Two people are visible in a small boat on the water. The overall atmosphere is serene and exotic.

## Finding #5:

### Where are you finding new contacts and connections?

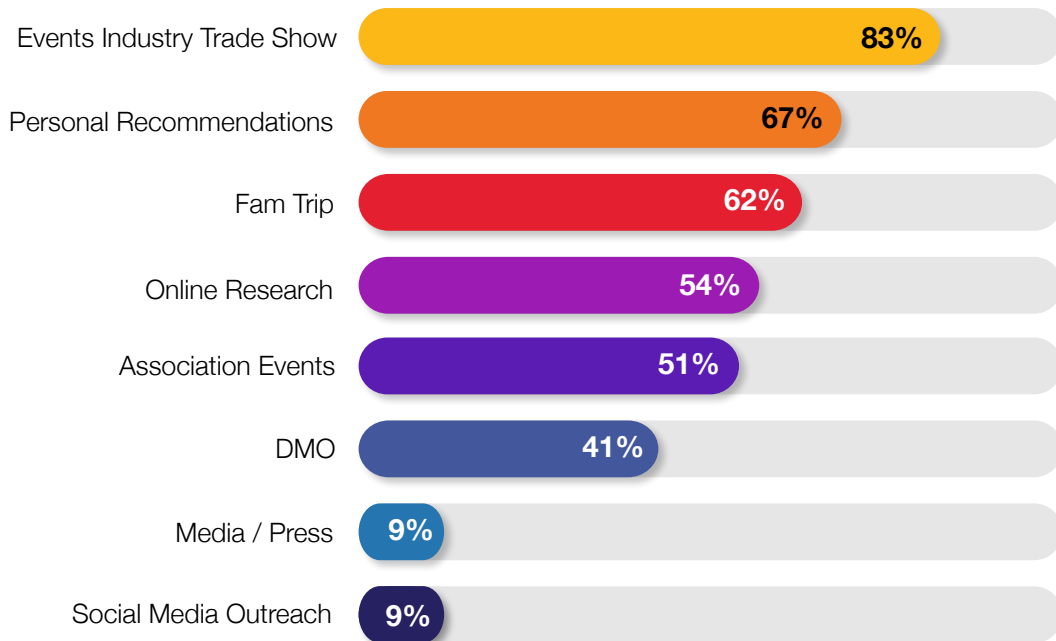
***Settings that encourage face-to-face interactions — like trade shows and fam trips — are preferred by planners, as well as personal recommendations.***

More than 50 percent of planners surveyed said they look to forge and strengthen industry relationships at event industry trade shows, through personal recommendations, and as part of fam trips. They're also open to finding the information they need through online research, and at association events.

While around four in 10 incentive organizers look for information from destination marketing organizations (DMOs), only a small handful rely on social media — connections or industry media.



## Preferred industry sources



### Checking in:



- What common threads do the most helpful industry information channels share?
- Are there any “dark horses” in this mix, that could surge in popularity over the next 1-2 years?
- How have hybrid workflows impacted the value of different industry information sources?





## Finding #6:

### What's clouding the horizon?

***Strategic planners will need to figure out the best ways to face down the obstacles of rising costs, geopolitical instability, and talent impacts that continue to reverberate.***

Nearly all of the incentive professionals who responded to this survey are concerned with the impact of rising costs and inflation.

And with much of the world watching how election results play out around the world in 2024, alongside ethno-national conflicts raging, it's perhaps not surprising that nearly half of the survey-takers are also concerned about geopolitical instability.



## Storm Clouds

Rising costs & inflation	<b>94.74%</b>
Geopolitical instability	<b>49.12%</b>
Lack of real internal support from our senior leadership team for what we do in events and incentive travel planning	<b>22.81%</b>
Lack of talent / too many new and untrained employees	<b>22.81%</b>
Layoffs that will impact my organization / wider sector	<b>21.05%</b>
Growing urgency around climate change / climate justice	<b>17.54%</b>
Lack of objective measurement of event success	<b>14.04%</b>
AI and new technology	<b>14.04%</b>

When asked about “red lines” that would negatively impact destination selection or the success of incentive events, respondents called out factors related to participants’ physical safety and security; potential impacts of extreme weather; ability and options to safeguard qualifiers; and in-destination sociopolitical stability.

### Checking in:



- Where — or who — does the buck stop with, when facing rising costs of incentive programs?
- How can corporate planners find support in a VUCA\* world?
- Who can afford to remain apolitical?

*\*VUCA = volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous*

## A few final words

Designed to capture the current moment in time, we hope the findings here are useful to you and your teams as you think about what's on the horizon for your own roles in delivering successful incentive travel and motivational events.

SITE extends its immense gratitude to all of the professionals who took part in this survey, and to Hilton for powering this snapshot study.

For anyone interested in learning more about SITE, we invite you to explore [siteglobal.com/join](https://siteglobal.com/join) to discover more about the work SITE does to advance the business case for incentive travel and how you can connect with and be part of our community.





