U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

SUPPORTING PARTNER Maritz

MEETINGS Meet the Moment

Executive Summary:
Research on the Value of In-Person Meetings

OVERVIEW

To support its Meetings Meet the Moment campaign, U.S. Travel commissioned Heart+Mind Strategies to investigate how senior business decision-makers think about, choose, and ultimately advocate for in-person meetings.

The findings are clear. Off-site, in-person meetings remain a vital part of how organizations operate, even as large-scale virtual meetings have become commonplace. The vast majority of executives agree in-person meetings help them operate their business more effectively, and half expect to hold more in the next two years. They also prefer in-person meetings over other media as a source of information about business trends and best practices in their field.

The most influential driver for considering a new in-person meeting is the opportunity to capitalize on new growth opportunities; cost remains the top hurdle. Overall, the business outcomes in-person meetings help to achieve (e.g., strengthening business relationships, accelerating decision-making, driving stronger alignment, deepening trust, etc.) is what most effectively motivates executive consideration.

MEETING PURPOSE DRIVES MEETING FORMAT

Executives are clear-eyed about the purpose of in-person vs. virtual meetings.

- **The in-person advantage:** Executives see in-person meetings as necessary to combat the lack of connection from remote work, citing spontaneity, faster engagement with staff, and the impromptu "magic" moments that can't be replicated virtually.
- **The virtual role:** Virtual meetings are primarily associated with one-way communication, simple topics, and routine operations conversation among smaller audiences.
- **The hybrid compromise:** Hybrid meetings are considered a flexible, practical compromise for geographically distributed teams, but the realities of mixed participation make it an imperfect approach.

HOW EXECUTIVES WEIGH THE TRADE-OFFS

Execs weigh each decision against the business outcome at stake.

- **A justification process:** Executives describe a "justification" process that weighs potential business return against the dollar and time cost of meeting in person.
- **Beyond dollar ROI:** Perceived return on investment is not a dollar figure but other valuable outcomes such as better strategic alignment, stronger client and partner relationships, speed to decisions, and a more engaged team.
- **Case by case, not policy:** Rarely does formal policy mandate when to choose in-person over virtual. Leaders weigh each decision on its own merits, based on the purpose and potential difference in outcomes between meeting formats.

WHAT IN-PERSON DELIVERS THAT OTHER FORMATS CAN'T

Executives are consistent on what makes meeting in person different.

- **Vital for business success:** The vast majority (95%+) of executives agree that off-site, in-person meetings help them operate their business more effectively, describing them as a necessity.

- **Trust and relationships:** Executives agree in-person meetings strengthen relationships and trust.
- **Stronger alignment, faster decisions:** In-person interaction results in better, more in-depth dialogue that produces stronger alignment and faster decisions.
- **Culture and values:** In-person meetings help executives reinforce workplace culture and corporate values – especially when teams are dispersed geographically.
- **Where the real business gets done:** Virtual meetings can't easily replicate unscripted moments. Executives surveyed say conversations outside the main agenda are frequently where "real business gets done."

EXECUTIVES INTEND TO KEEP IN-PERSON MEETINGS ALIVE AND WELL

Despite the normalization of virtual meetings, in-person remains essential, and executives expect to do more of it.

- **Still essential:** Off-site, in-person meetings remain a vital part of how organizations operate, even as large-scale virtual meetings are commonplace.
- **Not interchangeable with virtual:** While most companies now hold large (150+ attendees) virtual meetings, executives continue to schedule multiple in-person meetings each year, indicating they view in-person formats as necessary for certain objectives rather than interchangeable with virtual options.
- **In-person boosts careers:** A striking 90% of executives agree in-person meetings have positively influenced their careers, increasing visibility with senior leadership, strengthening networks and enhancing leaders' ability to make decisions.
- **Primed for growth:** Half of executives (53%) expect to hold more in-person, off-site meetings in the next two years. Among Millennial executives, that number rises to 73%.
- **Willing to advocate:** Half (49%) are very likely to advocate for more in-person meetings, with a special emphasis on strategic management meetings.

WHAT TRIGGERS A NEW IN-PERSON MEETING AND WHAT GETS IN THE WAY

The decision to meet in person is increasingly outcome-driven.

- **Growth is the #1 trigger:** New growth opportunities are the most influential reason executives consider a new off-site, in-person meeting.
- **Other triggers:** Other reasons for net-new meetings include enhancing connection (internally and externally) and the need to disrupt "business as usual" to improve business performance.
- **The top hurdle:** Cost is the #1 hurdle to clear before going in-person. Other challenges register as only moderate impediments for most executives.
- **Articulating business value:** Executives' willingness to advocate for off-site, in-person meetings increases meaningfully when the business value is clearly articulated and defensible.
- **How to justify the investment:** The most important justifications for demonstrating return on investment are strengthening relationships, breaking down silos for better collaboration, and accelerating strategic alignment, in that order.

METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted by Heart+Mind Strategies in three phases between October 2025 and February 2026. Phase 1a included 11 in-depth interviews with U.S. Travel industry stakeholders across destination, hospitality, and meetings industry segments. Phase 1b included 30 in-depth interviews with executive decision-makers responsible for decisions about large meetings of 150 or more attendees, representing a mix of industries, company sizes, seniority levels, regions, meeting types, and attitudes toward in-person meetings. Phase 2 was a quantitative online survey of 102 senior executive decision-makers (vice president or higher) at companies with $250 million or more in annual revenue, who hold or are open to holding off-site overnight business meetings of 150 or more attendees. The sample reflected a balanced mix of industries, company sizes, U.S. regions, ages, and gender. Where subgroup callouts are noted, they are statistically significant but based on small base sizes and should be treated as directional.