IACC Meeting Room of the Future Barometer

INSIGHTS FROM 124 BUSINESS EVENT VENUES AND MEETING PLANNER PERSPECTIVES

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Introduction & Methodology

Since 2016, the "Meeting Room of the Future" report has integrated insights from meeting planners, venue operators, IACC members and industry experts worldwide. Conducted by IACC and Development Counsellors International, this research provides firsthand insight from meeting venues into their experiences as they deal with returning business, new-client priorities and an evolving hybrid-technology landscape.

This year's report builds on those findings by exploring newly emerged and important topics. It also highlights some notable differences from the most-recent 2024 report, across world regions and between residential and non-residential venues.

Some key insights of this report are:

- **Food and beverage trends are shifting: Food service has become more personalised and complicated, and alcohol consumption is declining. Eighty-nine percent of respondents reported an increase in requests for dietary preferences; 57% noted reduced alcohol consumption among their attendees.**
- **Venues are becoming increasingly adept at meeting the unique behaviours of the younger generation by introducing new ways to engage attendees, providing frequent breaks and organising spaces to suit shorter attention spans.**
- **Adaptability remains essential for effective and engaging meetings. An increasing number of venues are implementing versatile furniture solutions that allow for rapid reconfiguration to meet "day-of" client requests.**

Worldwide, 124 venue operators representing North America, Europe and the Asia Pacific regions responded to the 40-question online survey. Fifty-five percent and 45% of our sample was non-residential and residential venues, respectively.

The continually growing meetings and event industry has become increasingly competitive. Evolving technologies, declining budgets and freedom from travel restrictions have required venues of all types to evaluate consistently their facilities, services and programming.

This research dives deep into venues' priorities, how they adapt to attendees' needs and the outlook for future investment in technology and facilities. Staying on top of emerging trends is critical for an industry that has experienced tremendous upheaval and challenges during the last decade.

According to the 2026 Events Industry Council Global Economic Significance of Business Events Study, business events generated US$1.3 trillion in direct spending globally during 2025 and supported US$1.8 trillion in total GDP impact worldwide, reinforcing the increasingly strategic role meetings and events play within the global economy.

"The insights shared within this year's Meeting Room of the Future report once again demonstrate the pace at which our industry continues to evolve. The perspectives and experiences contributed by venue operators and industry experts around the world provide valuable guidance that help us shape and navigate the future development of meetings and business events over the next two to three years."

— Mark Cooper, CEO, IACC

Venues’ Priorities and the Role of Experience Creation

Venues need to evaluate their facilities regularly to maintain a competitive edge and determine when upgrades or renovations are necessary. This process includes considering feedback from various sources, though internal and external information remain the primary influences on investment choices. These key factors shaping investments correspond with those identified during 2024:

1. Customer feedback
2. Competitors’ products and service offerings
3. Reports about industry research and trends

Venue operators regard customer feedback as the primary factor influencing their decisions to allocate resources for enhancements to their venues, including meeting space design, technology upgrades, and food and beverage options. Additionally, they closely monitor competitors’ activities within their country and stay abreast of industry research and prevailing consulting trends.

Figure 1: Importance of factors for deciding innovation, by year

	2026	2024	2020	2018
1st	Customer feedback	Customer feedback	Customer feedback	Customer feedback
2nd	Competitors’ products and service offerings (nationally)	Competitors’ products and service offerings (nationally)	Competitors’ products and service offerings (nationally)	Competitors’ products and service offerings (nationally)
3rd	Reports about industry research and trends	Reports about industry research and trends	IACC research, trends and white papers	Other (local economy, local competitors and budget resources)
4th	Supplier marketing, sales and introducing product innovations	Supplier marketing, sales and introducing product innovations	Reports about industry research and trends	IACC research, trends and white papers
5th	Competitors’ products and service offerings (globally)	Competitors’ products and service offerings (globally)	Competitors’ products and service offerings (globally)	Supplier marketing, sales and introducing product innovations
6th	IACC research, trends and white papers	IACC research, trends and white papers	Supplier marketing, sales and introducing product innovations	Competitors’ products and service offerings (globally)

Customer feedback and competitors' product and service offerings have been the leading influencers of investment decisions during the last three editions of the study and are consistently the top two influencers, regardless of region. Industry research is also an important source of information.

> "The IACC Meeting Room of the Future report underscores our commitment to creating dynamic, flexible, and technology-driven spaces to spark innovation. At Aramark, we actively leverage insights from this report to shape our offerings, proactively address client needs, and ensure our accommodations and meeting spaces consistently exceed expectations."
>
> ***—Susan Liston, SVP, Aramark Destinations***

Figure 2: Importance of factors for deciding innovation, by region

<table>
<tr><th></th><th>Europe</th><th>North America</th><th>Asia Pacific</th></tr>
<tr><td>1st</td><td>Customer feedback</td><td>Customer feedback</td><td>Customer feedback</td></tr>
<tr><td>2nd</td><td>Competitors' products and service offerings (nationally)</td><td>Competitors' products and service offerings (nationally)</td><td>Competitors' products and service offerings (nationally)</td></tr>
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A major driving force behind recent advancements is the desire among planners and participants to craft meaningful experiences. The concept of "experience creation" continues as a major trend in meeting planning, and its significance shows no sign of diminishing soon. However, building unique experiences has grown more complex due to shifting generational tastes, tight budgets and emerging technologies shaping attendees' wants.

> "Experience-based or multisensory experiences has been one of the largest trends in hospitality over the past few years. This is particularly true as consumers seek out and engage in tech-free vacations, hobbies, and events. This need for experiences that are more meaningful and engage all of their senses crosses generations, though specific generational preferences and demands can be used to create more personalised experiences. Through all of this, it's important to keep in mind meaningful experiences do not need to be expensive or based on costly innovation," "Anything that gets the guest to put down their phone and connect not only with the food and beverage but with others – will have a major impact. Anything that requires greater engagement without challenging the primary focus of the event (such as networking easily with conference attendees or socialising at weddings) will create more meaningful and memorable experiences."
>
> ***—Maeve Webster, President, Menu Matters***

More than two-thirds of responding venues indicated strong agreement that they are responsible for "experience creation" as a part of delivering successful meetings.

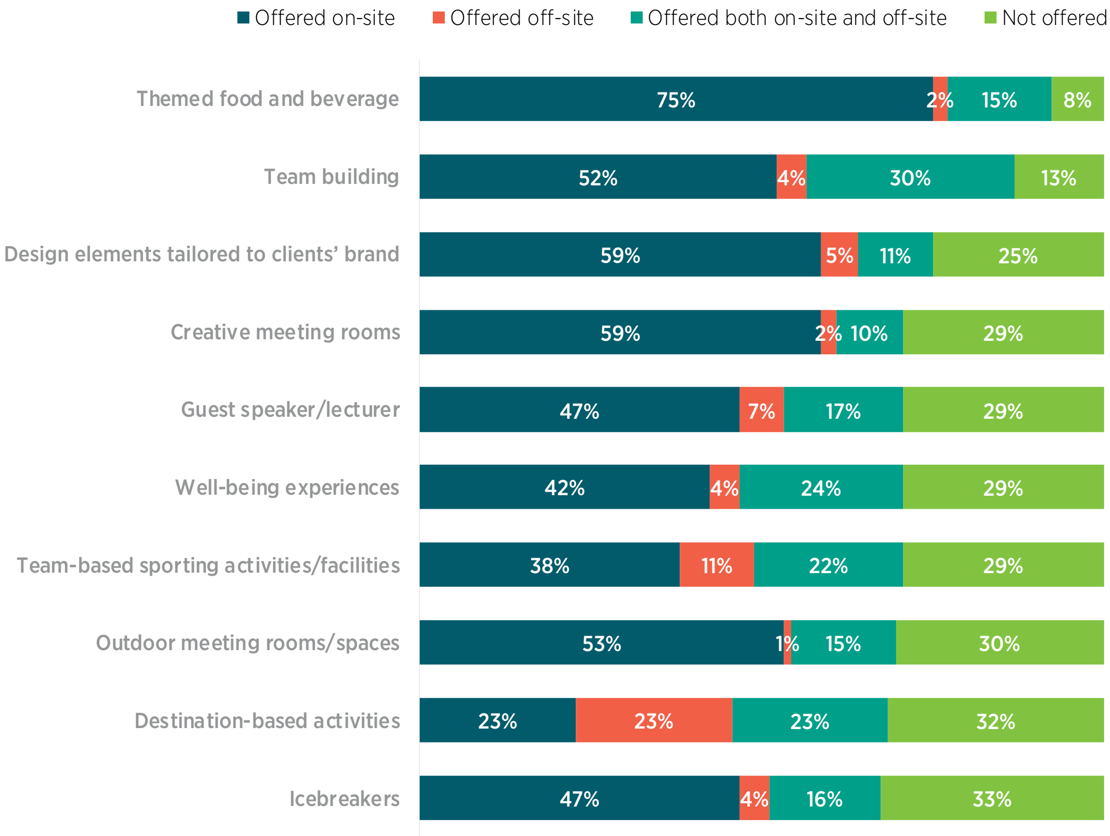
In turn, venues offer many different elements to assist with the "experience creation" element of meetings in the hope of differentiating themselves from their competition. However, these elements are primarily offered on a venue's property.

- Themed food and beverage (92% of venues) and team building (87%) elements are the most-offered element among venues.
- Outdoor meeting spaces, destination-based activities and icebreakers were the least likely to be offered, but more than half of the surveyed venues still offer them.

In the "2025 Meeting Room of the Future," which focused on meeting planners, creating unique experiences was among their top priorities. More than two-thirds of meeting planners surveyed during 2025 agreed that their current role involves more "experience creation" than it did previously.

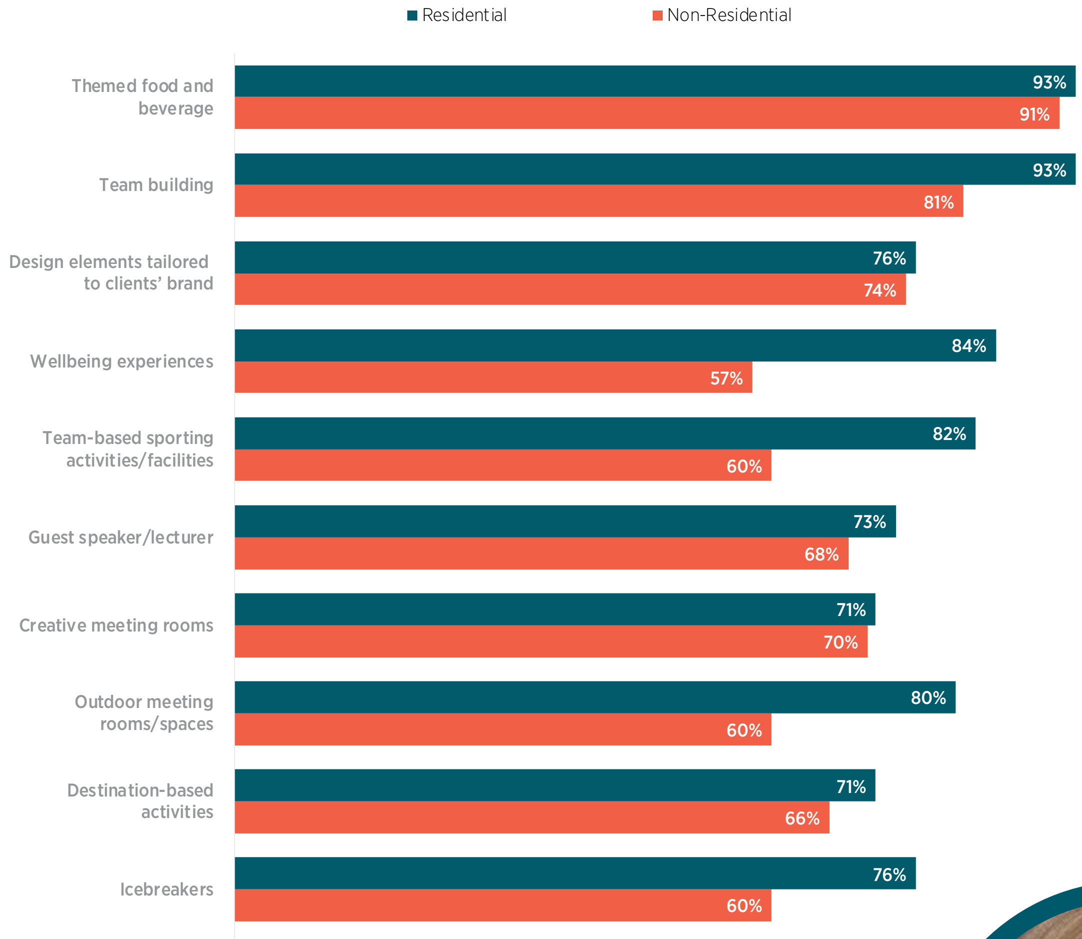
The growing emphasis on "experience creation" also reflects wider industry recognition that business events are increasingly valued not only for information exchange, but for their ability to strengthen organisational culture, build trust and accelerate collaboration. The 2026 EIC Global Economic Significance of Business Events Study notes that business events "create the conditions for people to come together with purpose, build trust, exchange knowledge, strengthen cultures and move ideas into action.

Figure 3: On- and off-site elements offered to assist with experience creation



Residential venues, compared to non-residential venues, are more likely to offer various experience-creation elements, such as team-building experiences, well-being experiences, team-based sporting activities and outdoor meeting space elements.

Figure 4: On- and off-site elements offered to assist with experience creation, by venue type

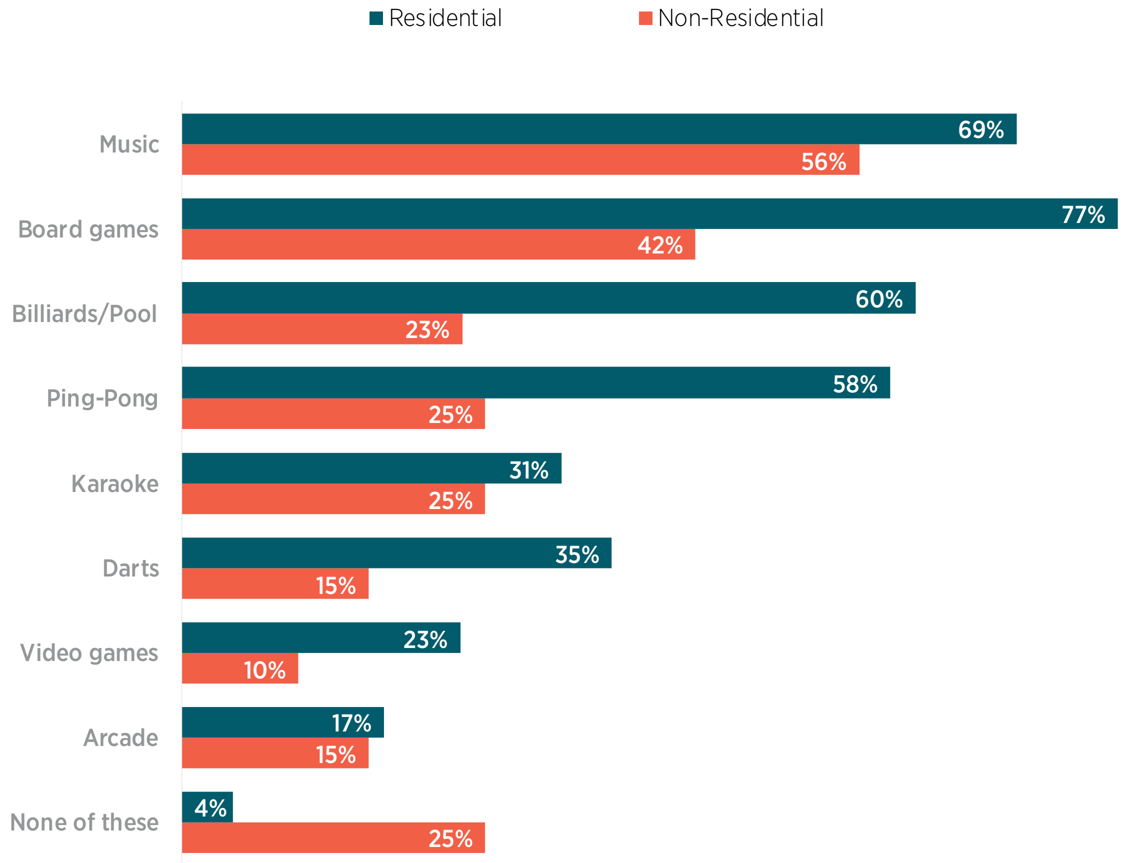


> "Our customers are building training programs with planned recreation activations — half-day for off-site fishing, golf, pickleball, etc. Being together, outside the meeting room, just for a few hours is becoming an integral part of the meeting."

—Maribeth Grandpre, VP of Global Accounts, CNS Connects

Attendees tend to spend more time at residential venues, which matches our findings that these venues provide more options for social entertainment than do non-residential venues. Among residential locations, music, board games, billiards/pool and ping-pong are the most commonly available activities. In contrast, about 25% of non-residential venues do not offer these entertainment choices.

Figure 5: Social entertainment options offered

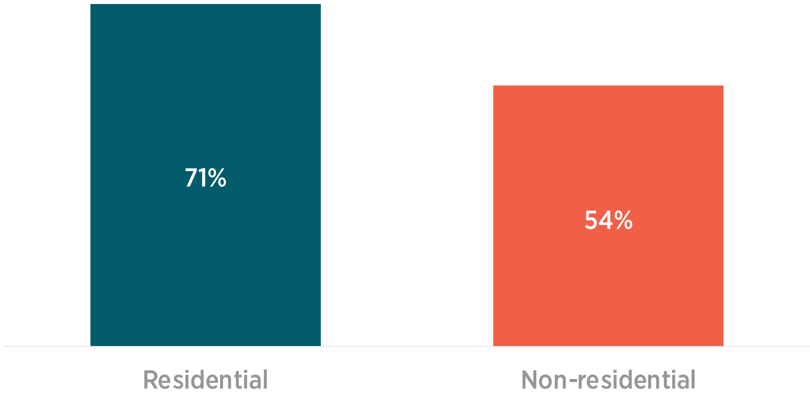


> We always try to share suppliers when two events from two different clients are scheduled consecutively. We offer price reductions for events that occupy our venue for more than one day. We offer discounts for events that are held at our venue year after year."
>
> **—IACC Member**

Realising that budgets are top of mind for everyone during 2026, venues must also balance experience creation with resources; thus, 62% of venues are creating budget-friendly experiences for their customers. A larger proportion of residential venues offer budget-friendly options.

Venues are creating budget-friendly experiences by using flexible and dynamic pricing for various service packages that allow clients to remove or add services that meet their customers' needs. Some venues include free options or lower-cost options that make use of venue space. Venues often negotiate with their contractors for ongoing partnerships, which allows them to reduce costs.

Figure 6: Venues reporting creation of budget-friendly experiences, by venue type



Almost all surveyed venues measure the effectiveness of their meetings events. Nearly 90% of venues prompt clients for feedback and two-thirds of them use the rate of returning clients to measure their effectiveness. Nearly all Asia Pacific venues surveyed use the rate of returning clients as a measure of the effectiveness of their meetings. Only 5% of European venues don't measure the effectiveness of meetings and events.

Figure 7: How venues are measuring the effectiveness of meetings and events

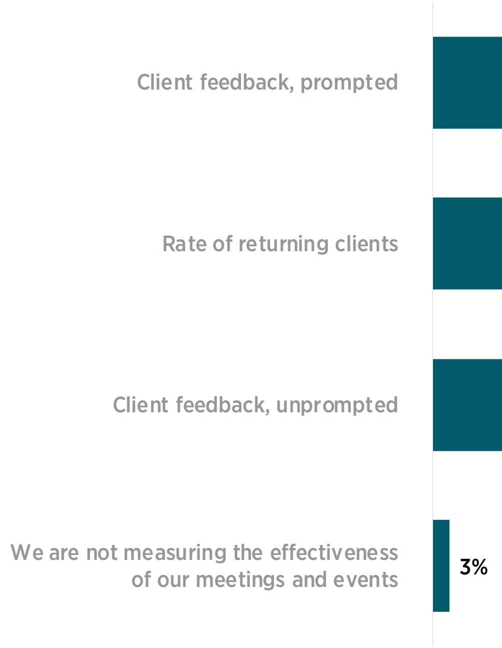
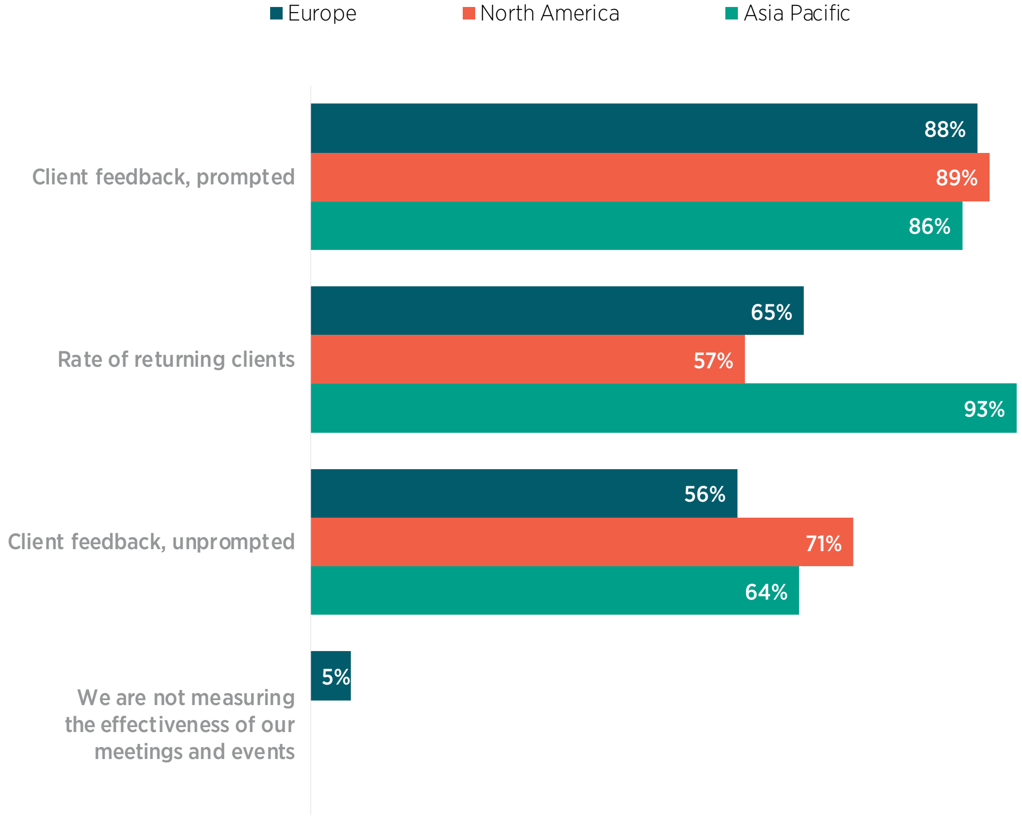


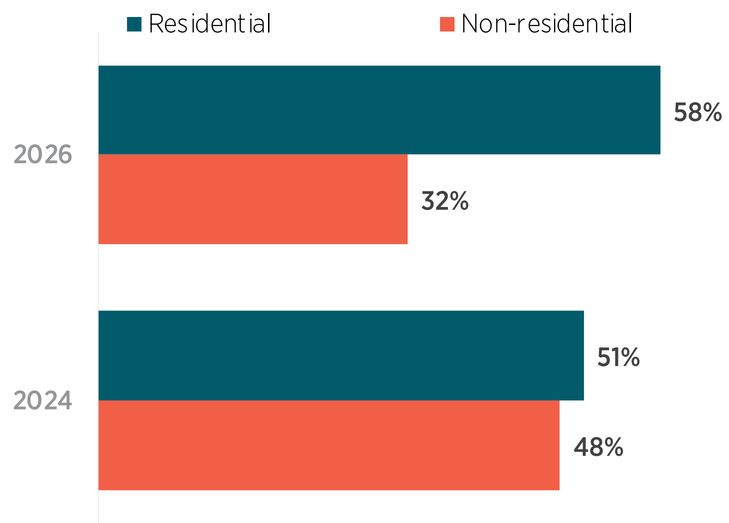
Figure 8: How venues are measuring the effectiveness of meetings and events, by region



Fostering Professional Development and Education

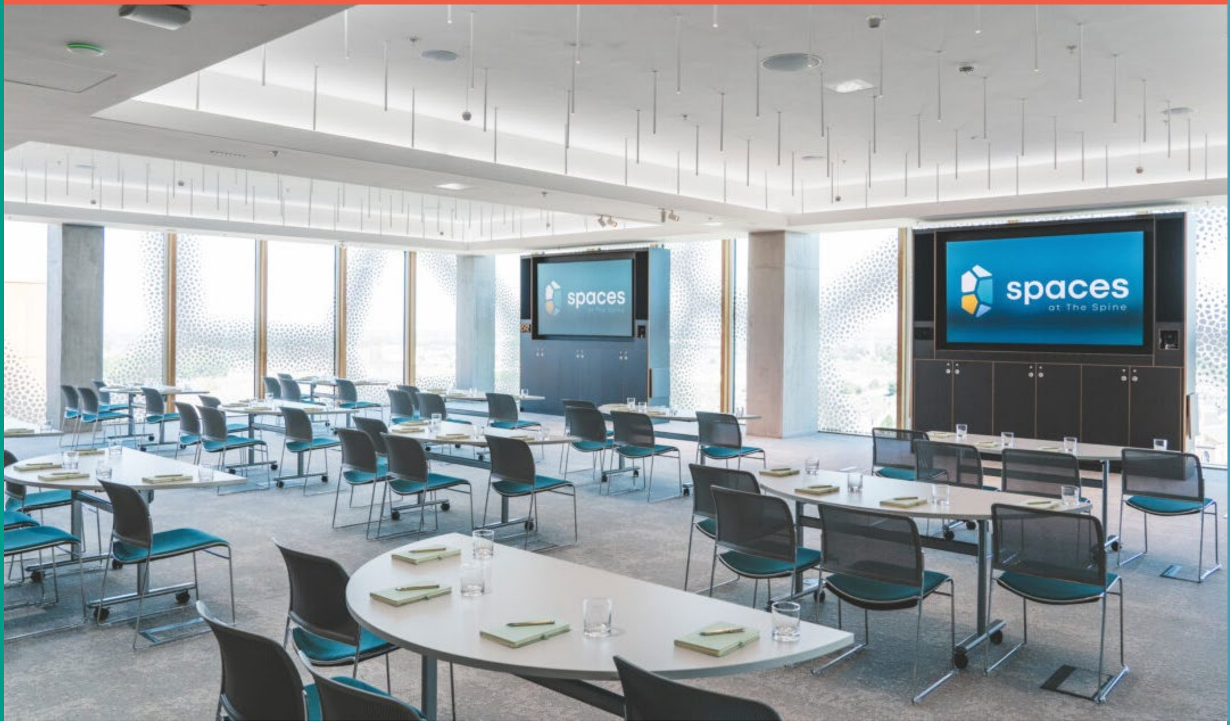
Although engaging experiences are a critical aspect of meetings and events, so are professional development and collective learning opportunities. Many venue operators are prioritising ways to improve educational experiences, with 45% indicating they're actively enhancing education during meetings. Notably, residential venues are making greater efforts, with 58% of them aiming to improve educational programming, compared to 32% of non-residential venues doing the same.

Figure 9: Percentage of venues enhancing educational programming, by venue type



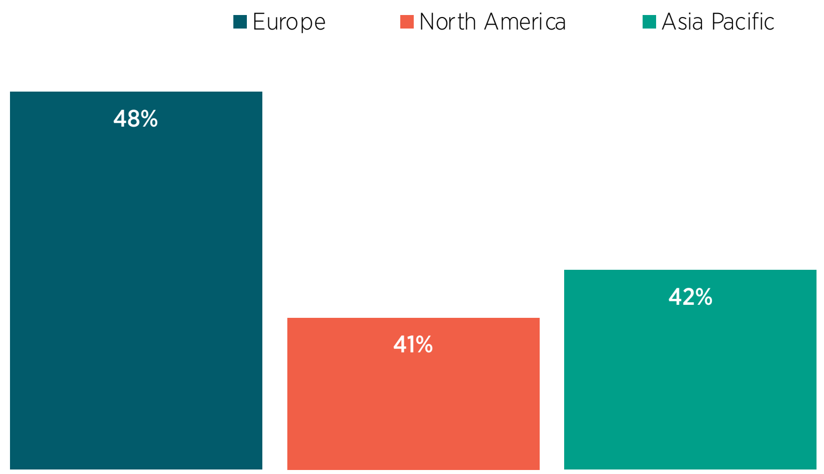
"Learning today is increasingly experiential, social and peer driven. Traditional classroom-style setups can fall short. Practical exercises, peer learning and collaborative workshops require places and spaces that are purpose-built for interaction, movement and flexibility. Venues that integrate adaptable layouts and comfortable, intentional seating designed for learning (not just listening) will outperform competitors as planners seek environments that support both individual development and organizational goals,"

—Jessie States, CMP, CMM, Vice President of consulting for Meeting Professionals International



Venues are advancing educational experiences by designing spaces tailored to their participants. Certain meeting rooms offer rapid flexibility and can be transformed quickly; others prioritise intuitive, implement cutting-edge technology or provide a wide range of tools to support various learning styles. Additionally, some venues use “place-based” education — immersing attendees in environments related directly to the subject matter — for greater engagement.

Figure 10: Percentage of venues enhancing educational programming, by region



Younger staff may be better positioned to recognize shifting generational needs, but they are less likely to be a position of leadership. Most venues have more millennials and Gen Z employees than leaders, which might make relating to and employing effective meeting practices for younger attendees more challenging for leadership. As these staff members age, this dynamic will naturally shift, but currently, venues with higher proportions of younger staff members in leadership might serve younger audiences better.

Figure 11: Percentage of venue's millennial staff in workforce vs. leadership

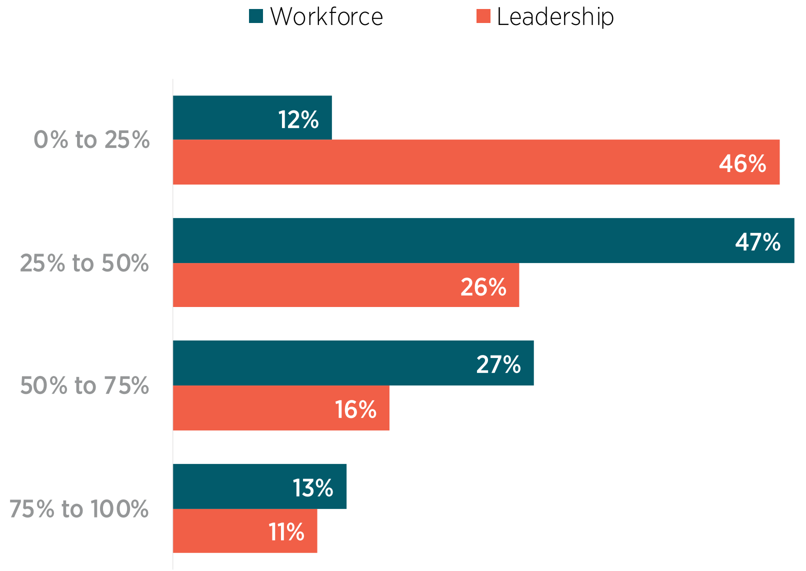
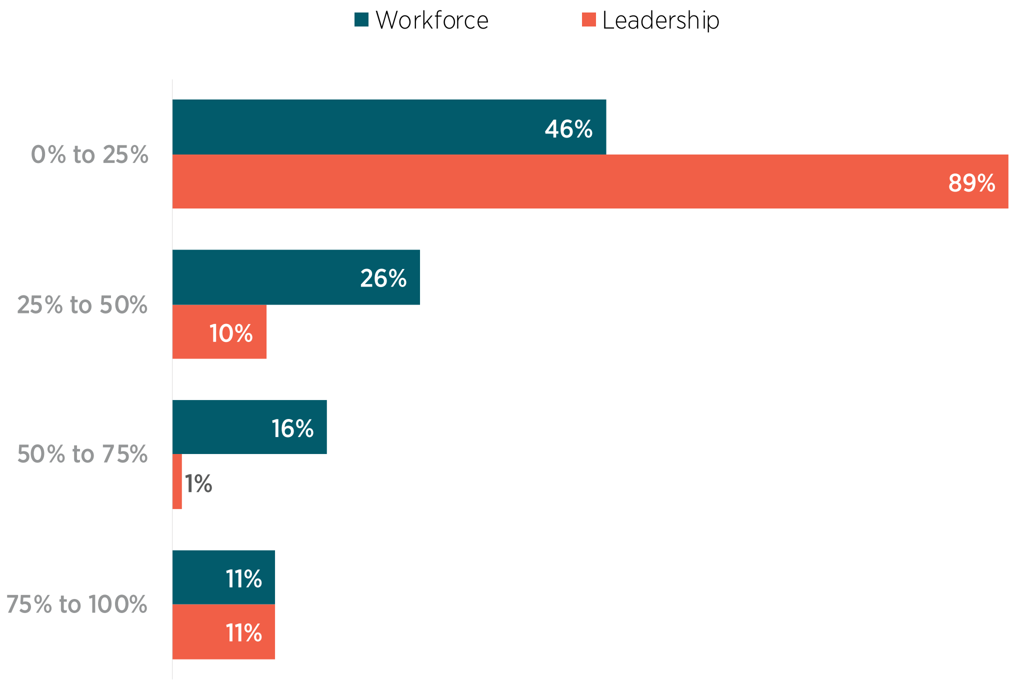
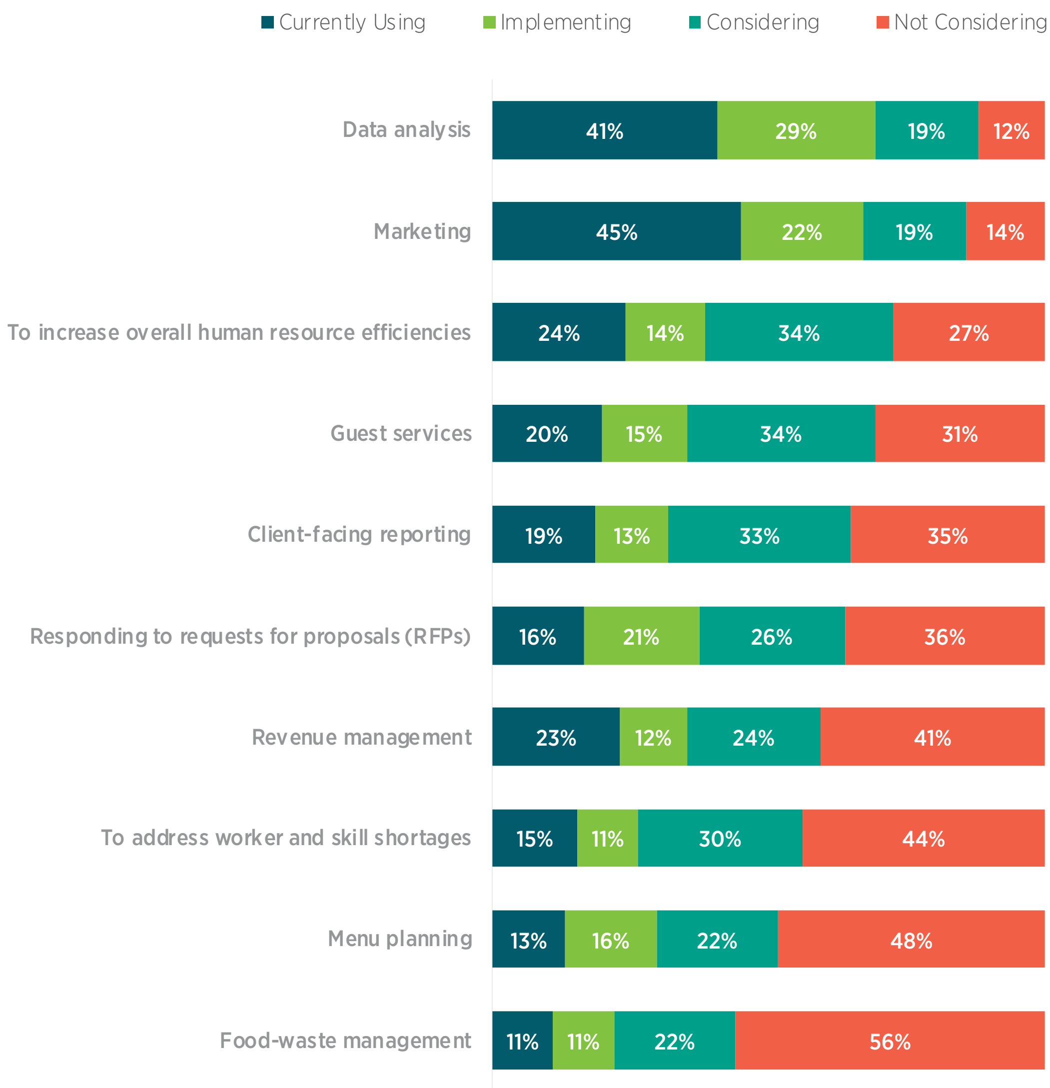


Figure 12: Percentage of venue's Gen Z staff in workforce vs. leadership



AI adoption is also increasing, mainly for data analysis and marketing. Few venues use or plan to use AI for addressing workforce shortages, menu planning or food-waste management. The most-common uses to consider using AI include improving guest services and human resource efficiency.

Figure 13: How venues are considering the use of AI



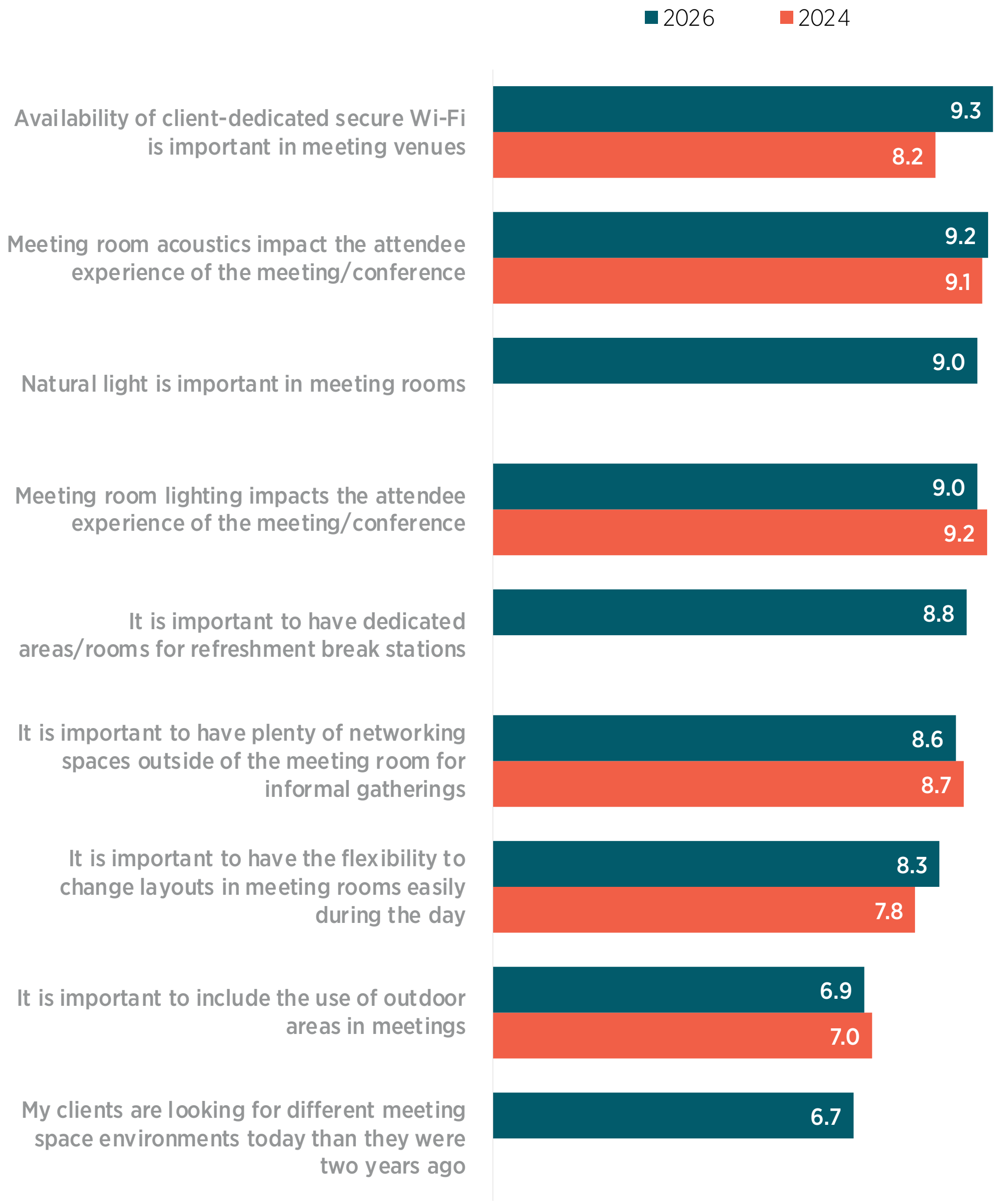
"Many staff in banquets have been in the industry and, oftentimes, in their venue for decades. Until recently, their job was "more, more, more," and now we want to put the brakes on that and even reverse it. The best AI-aided menu design is not going to overcome years of inertia where a human with emotions and influence can still override rules for service setup, portion sizing and replenishment. Food-waste prevention models relying on AI must be coupled with a change management strategy to fundamentally shift the perspective of those who are still the face of the business and who directly feel guest satisfaction as part of their role at an event."

—Aurora Dawn Benton, Chief Change Maker, Events Industry Council & Astrapto LLC

Meeting Space and Room Design

The importance of meeting room elements during 2026 is aligned with prior editions of this report. Venue operators have strongly agreed for several years that a meeting room's acoustics and lighting impact an attendee's experience. This year, we asked specifically about the importance of natural light, which garnered just as much agreement.

Figure 14: Agreement with select statements regarding meeting room elements, by year (1 = don't agree at all, 10 = strongly agree)



Non-residential venues, compared to residential venues, assign greater significance to Wi-Fi, acoustics and lighting. This trend likely arises because residential venues must account for lodging considerations, whereas non-residential venues can dedicate more attention to these specific elements.

> “As clients increasingly bring their own unified communications platforms, and as wireless presentation and content sharing become standard, venue Wi-Fi has become a mission-critical factor in non-residential meetings and events. In many cases, it can determine whether the experience succeeds or fails.”

—Scott McLain, President, Waveguide

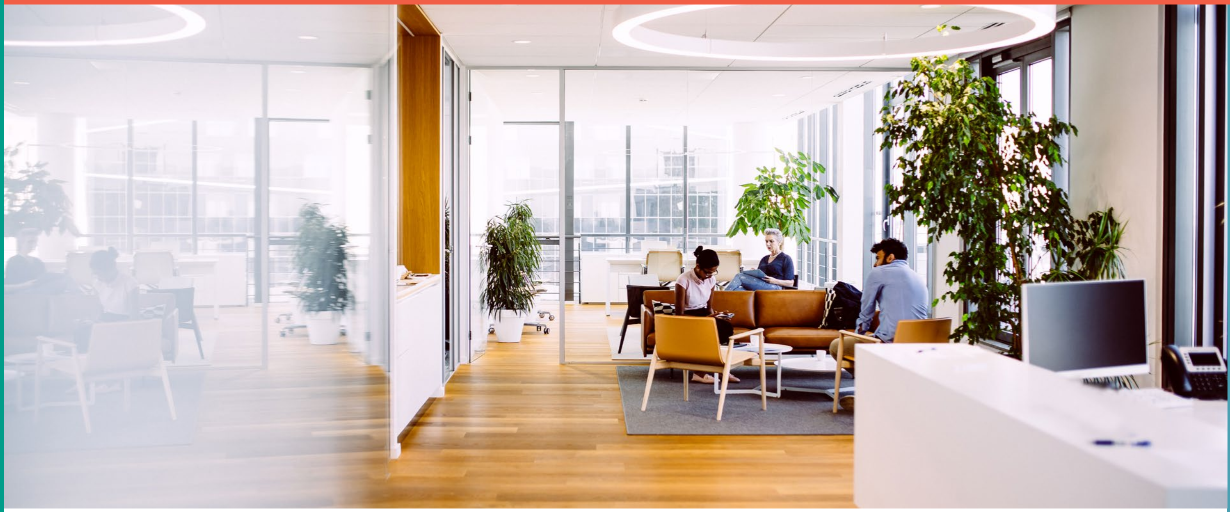
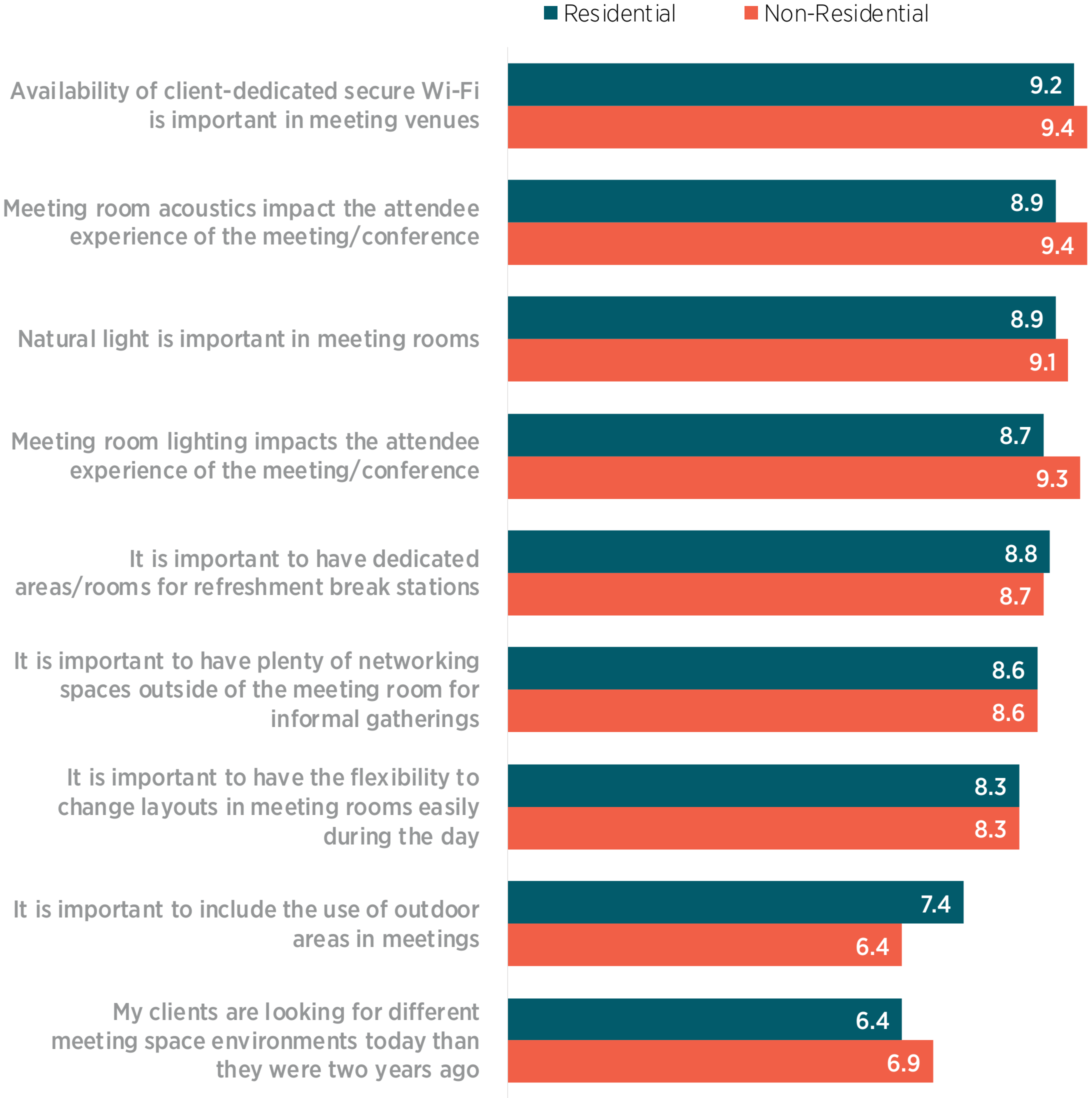
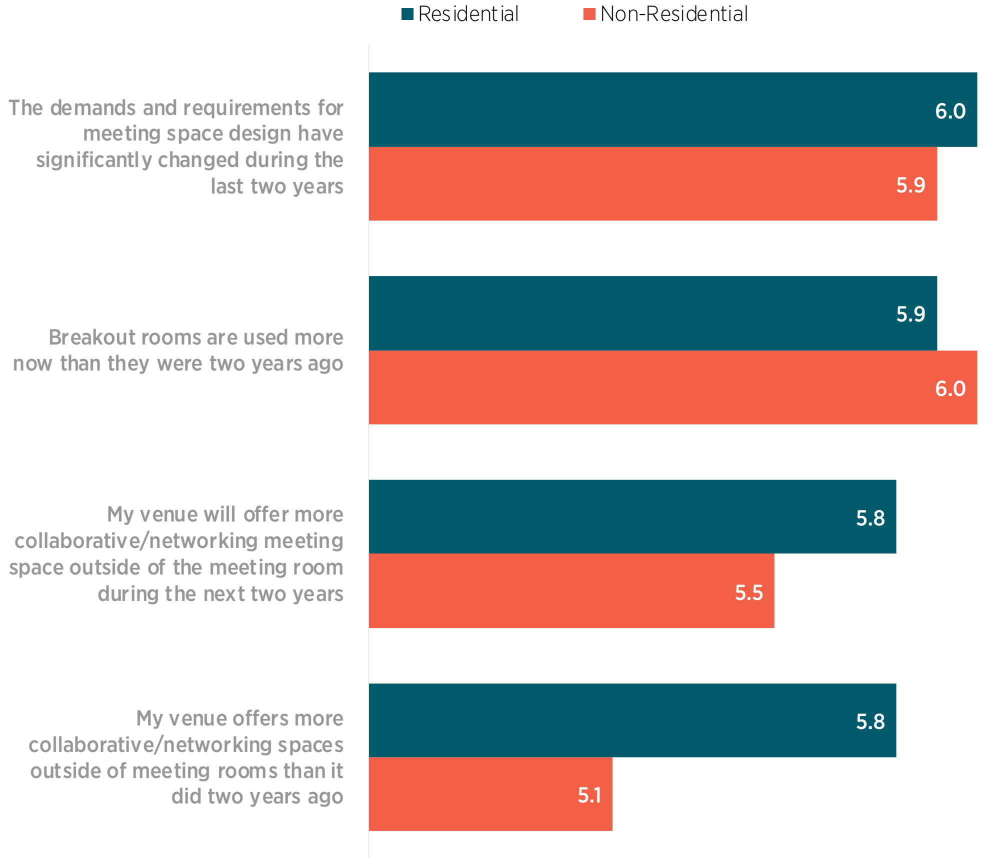


Figure 15: Agreement with select statements regarding meeting room elements (1 = don’t agree at all, 10 = strongly agree), by venue type



Clients’ needs for meeting rooms and spaces are continuing to shift. Many attendees have short attention spans for long, theatre-style meetings and retain more information from shorter sessions. Along with an increased need for flexibility in room design, many venues have clients who ask for more informal spaces for networking or workshops.

Figure 16: Agreement with select statements regarding meeting room elements (1 = don't agree at all, 10 = strongly agree)



The proportion of venues reporting that 100% of their meeting rooms have been outfitted with flexible furniture and equipment has continued to grow since 2020. Residential and non-residential venue operators are aligned on the percentage of their meeting rooms that have been outfitted with flexible furniture and equipment.

> "Clients' expectations for meeting space design have evolved significantly over the past two years. We're seeing a much stronger demand for flexible, multipurpose environments that can shift seamlessly between collaborative teamwork, hybrid meetings and focused individual work. Comfort, wellness and sustainability now play a larger role in decision-making, with clients asking for better acoustics, natural light, ergonomic furniture and materials that support environmental goals. Overall, the shift has been toward adaptable, tech-enabled spaces that feel inviting and support a wider range of workstyles."
>
> ***—IACC member***

Figure 17: Percentage of meeting space with furniture/equipment that allows for flexible layouts, by year

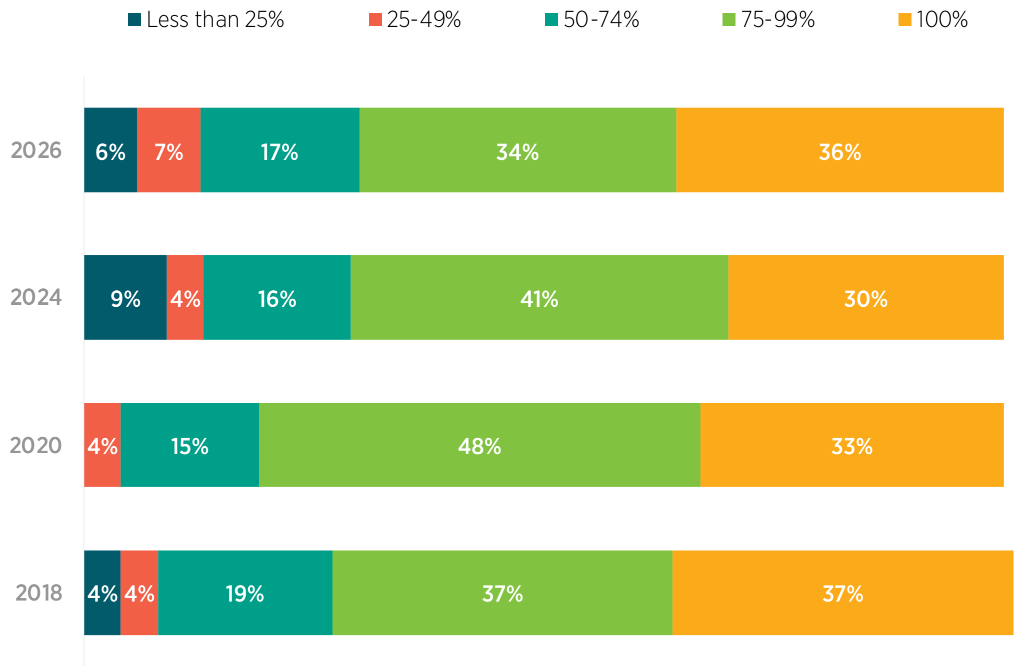
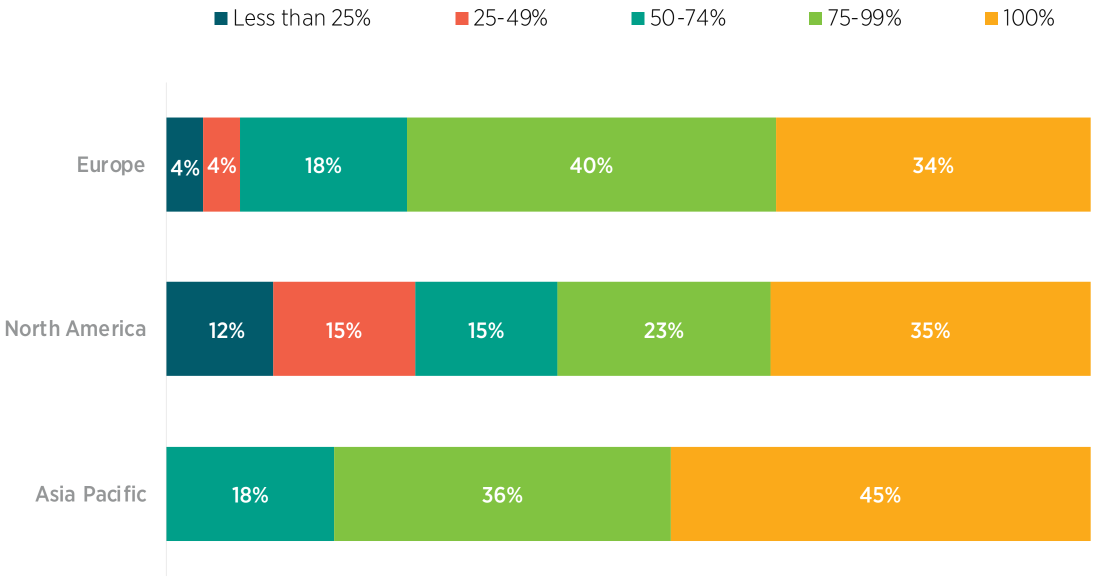


Figure 18: Percentage of meeting space with furniture/equipment that allows for flexible layouts, by region

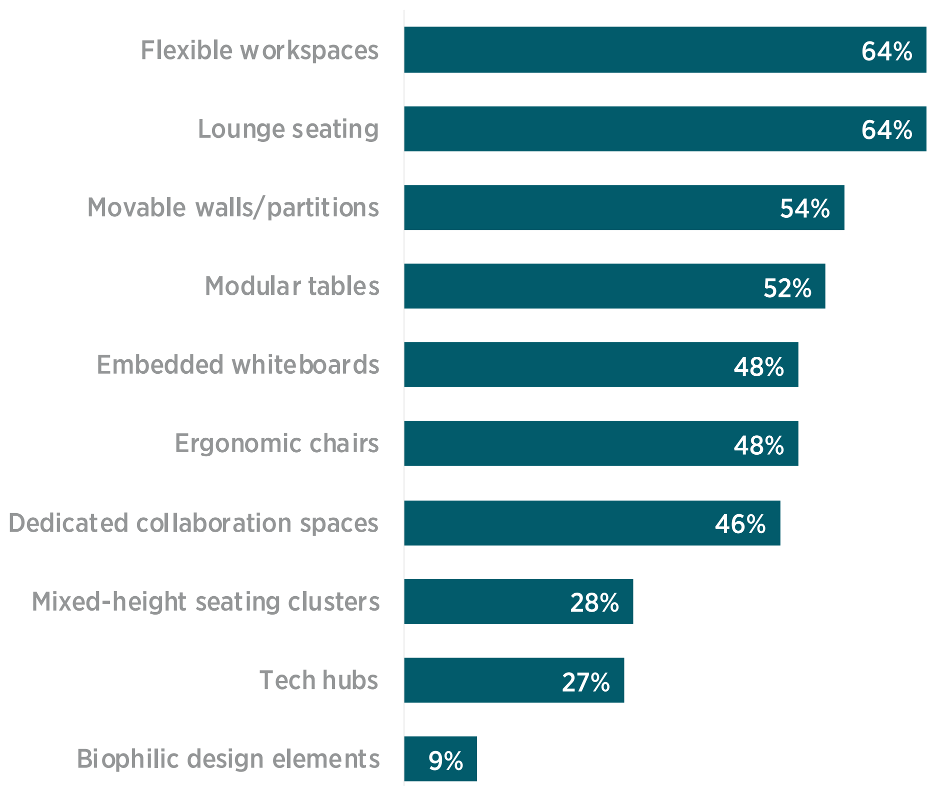


The Asia Pacific venues had the highest proportion of venues with 100% of meeting space containing flexible furniture, followed by North American venues and European venues, which had more in the 75-99% range than North American venues did.

Lounge seating and flexible workspaces are the furniture elements most likely included in room design to facilitate attendees' connection and foster flexibility. Moveable walls and partitions are also used to increase flexibility. Residential venues are prioritising different furniture options compared to non-residential and are more likely to use lounge seating. Meanwhile, non-residential facilities are more likely to incorporate ergonomic chairs. "More customers are asking for unique panel discussion options that include living room furniture", Maribeth Grandpre notes.

> "We've observed clear and consistent shifts in what clients require from meeting spaces, driven by changes in work styles, attendees' expectations, the adoption of hybrid technology and a greater emphasis on well-being and experience. Having the right setup in networking lounges connects people at either end of the day before the official networking or dining experiences kick in."
>
> *—IACC member*

Figure 19: Types of furniture added to facilitate connection and room flexibility



Costs and storage issues are the top barriers preventing venues from adopting even more flexible equipment. The cost of investment is more likely to prevent residential venues from expanding their flexible equipment roster, while product storage issues are more common with non-residential venues.

> "We have a lot of greenery inside, and we work a lot with the garden from a sustainability perspective — benefiting pollinators, increasing accessibility and creating cozy spaces for guests to visit and stop by. We recommend having walking and running trails in the surrounding area."
>
> ***—IACC member***

Figure 20: Types of furniture added to facilitate connection and room flexibility, by venue type

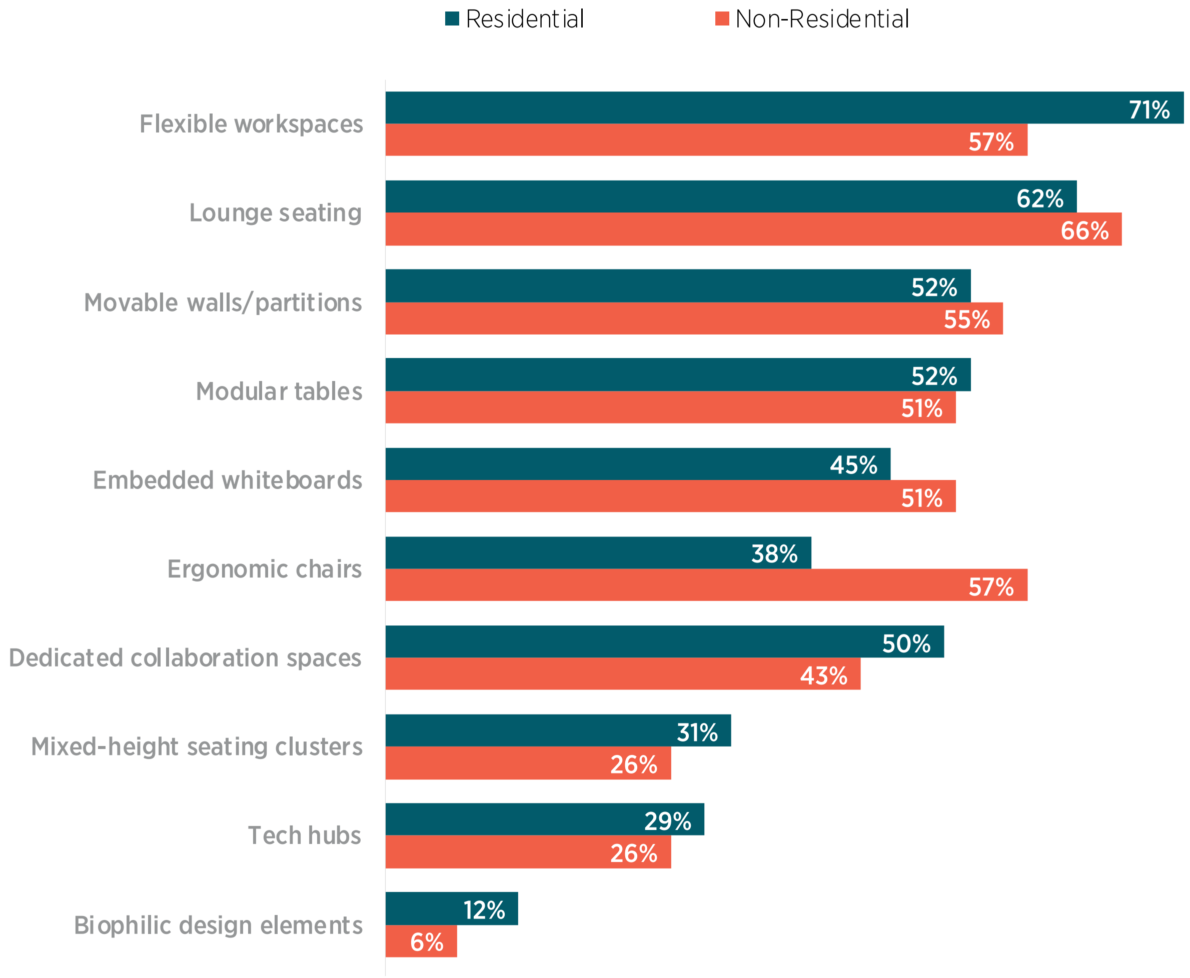
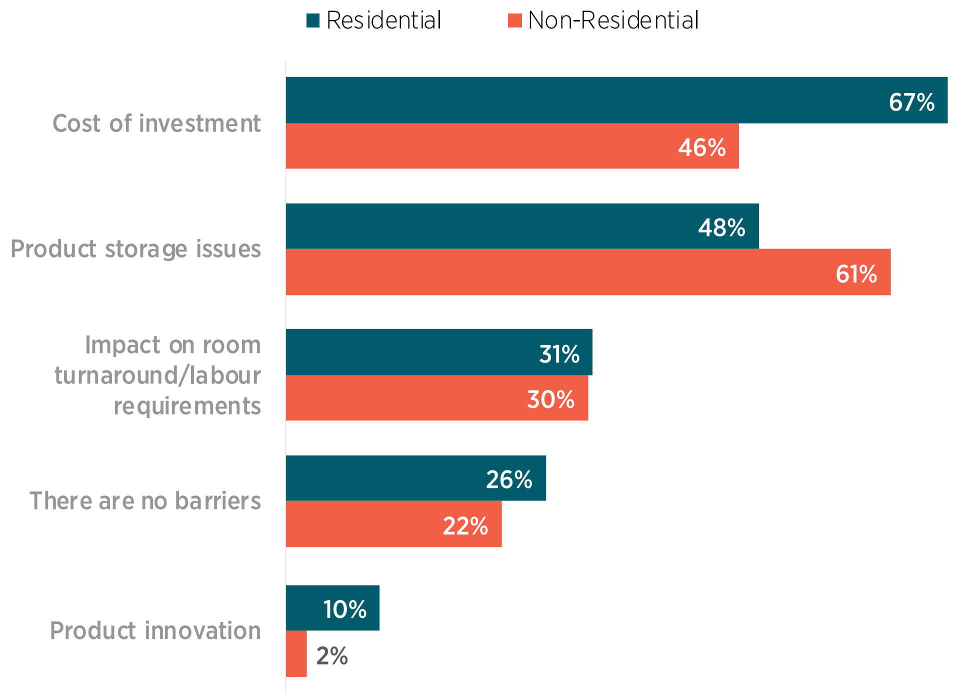


Figure 21: Barriers preventing greater adoption of flexible furniture and equipment, by venue type



Venue operators also embrace spaces beyond their meeting rooms, with 66% of venues reporting they encourage connections with the natural world. Residential venues are much more likely to foster these connections (80%) than do non-residential (52%).

The proportion of venues that encourage connections with the natural world has declined since 2020 but stayed well above half the venues. As pandemic-era restrictions continue to fade, the importance of outdoor and natural spaces might become less important for attendees.

> "Our venue integrates nature not as a backdrop but as a core experiential and behavioural design element across meetings, leisure and learning. Our approach combines location, programming and sensory design to actively foster connection with the natural environment."
>
> *— IACC member*

Figure 22: Percentage of venues that encourage connections with the natural world, by year

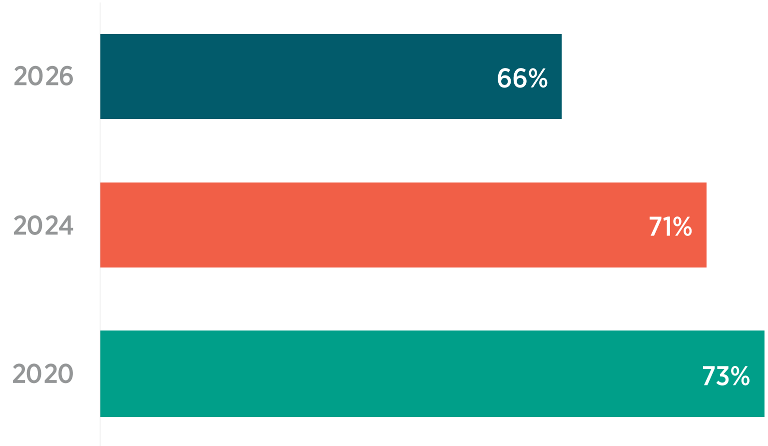
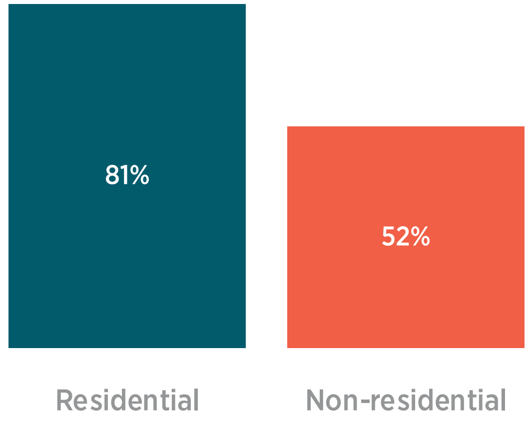


Figure 23: Percentage of venues that encourage connections with the natural world, by venue type



Venues are encouraging connections with the natural environment via:

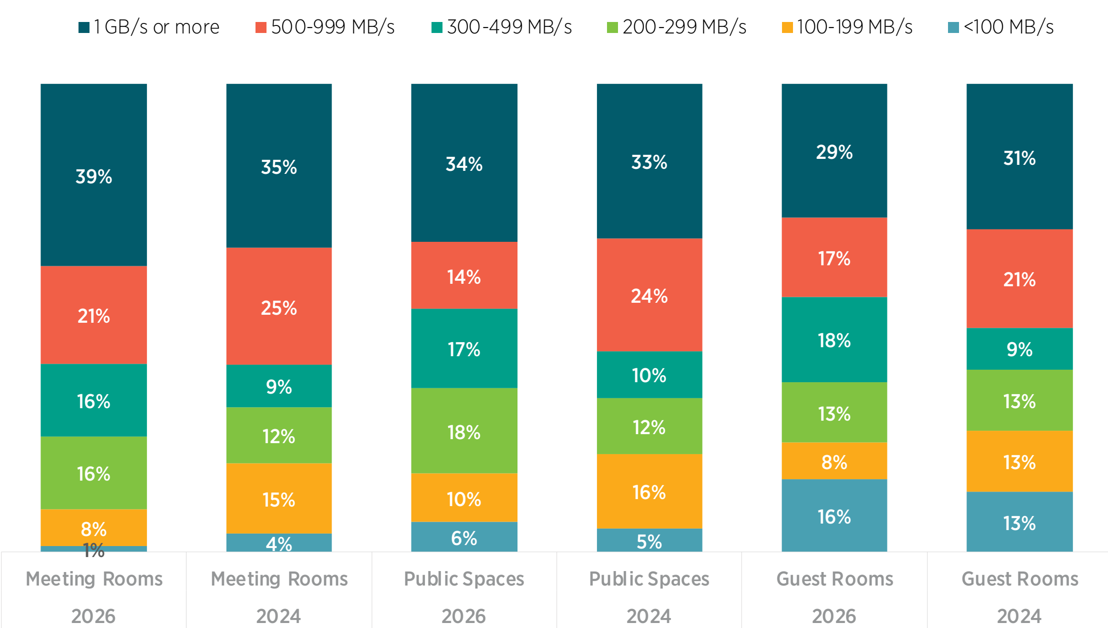
- Outdoor spaces, such as gardens, walking paths and trails, parks, forests and lakes
- Outdoor meeting spaces
- Plentiful greenery inside the venue
- Available exercise equipment, such as bicycles and kayaks
- Nature-focused destination activities, such as beach walks or countryside tours

The Impact of Technology and Its Evolution

Technology's role has become increasingly important in the effectiveness of meetings and the experience attendees have during those meetings. At a minimum, certain audiovisual and IT tools are considered essential. A venue would not be competitive without these elements, the most important of which are internet access and sufficient bandwidth.

About one-third of responding venues offer more than 1 GB of bandwidth in meeting rooms, public spaces and guest rooms, an amount that reflects the increased expectation that sufficient bandwidth will be available for attendees regardless of location.

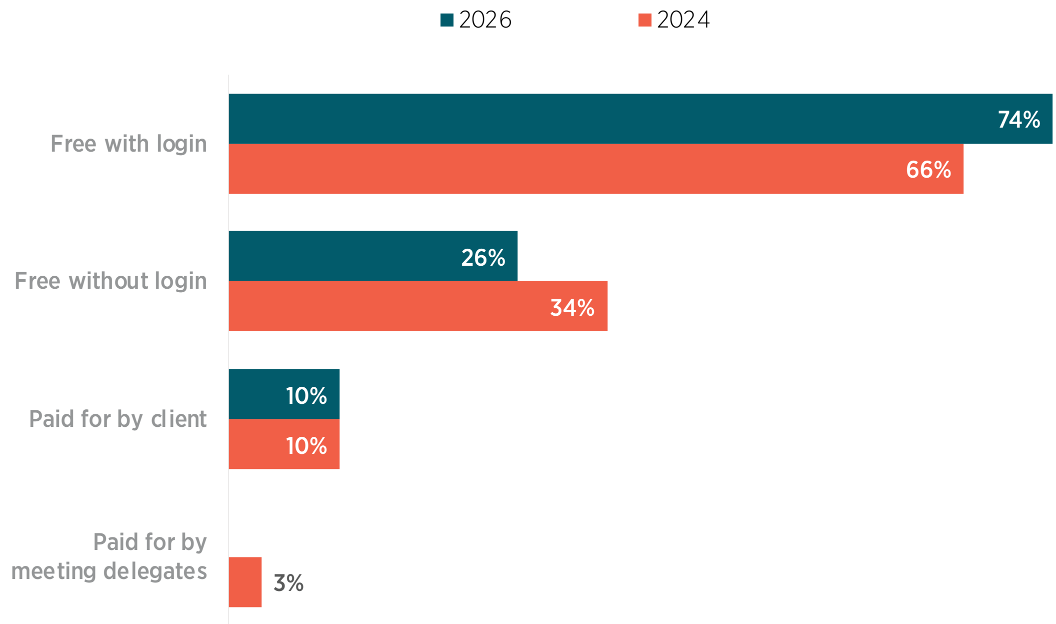
Figure 24: Available bandwidth (in mb) across venue locations, by year



Available bandwidth has remained consistent since 2024. More venues offer 1 GB/s or more of service in meeting rooms during 2026 than during 2024. Fewer venues offer bandwidth at the lower ends (less than 200 MB/s) than during 2024.

Nearly all venues offer free access, with or without a login. Some venues still require payment for internet access. None of the venues surveyed this year has options for internet access paid by the delegates or attendees.

Figure 25: Percentage of venues' method for providing internet access, by year



Venues appear to be keeping pace with technology by investing in the required infrastructure, with 87% reporting investment during the last two years, an increase of 12% from 2024. Seventy-four percent of venues guarantee bandwidth capacity as a standard offering, and a higher proportion of non-residential venues do so compared to residential ones.

87%

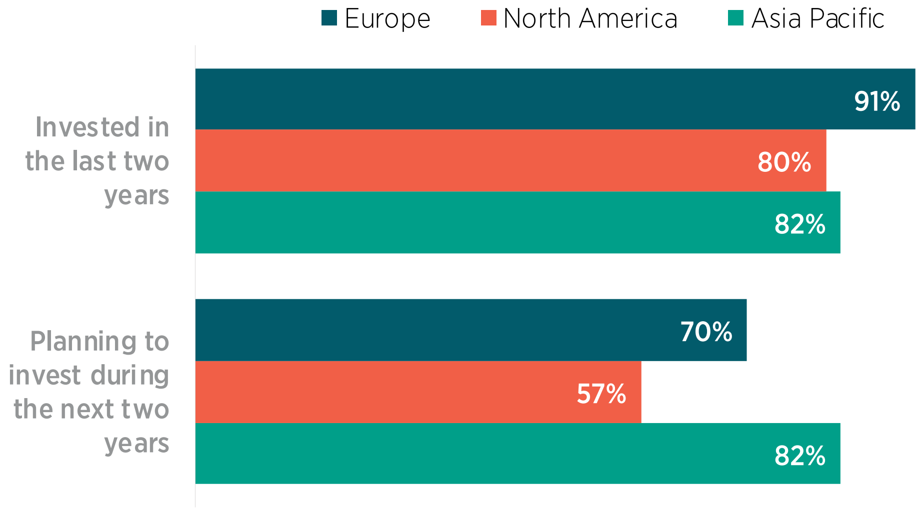
Have invested in internet infrastructure, hardware or both within the last two years.

64%

Plan on investing in internet infrastructure, hardware or both in the next 2 years.

European and North American venues demonstrate higher rates of infrastructure investment during the last two years compared to their anticipated investments during the next two years, suggesting that many venues have already fulfilled their requirements. Nonetheless, more than half of surveyed venues indicate ongoing plans for future investments. Europe reports the highest proportion of venues with completed investments; North America exhibits the lowest percentage planning further investment in internet or hardware. In contrast, 82% of Asia Pacific venues invested during the prior two years and intend to invest during the next two years.

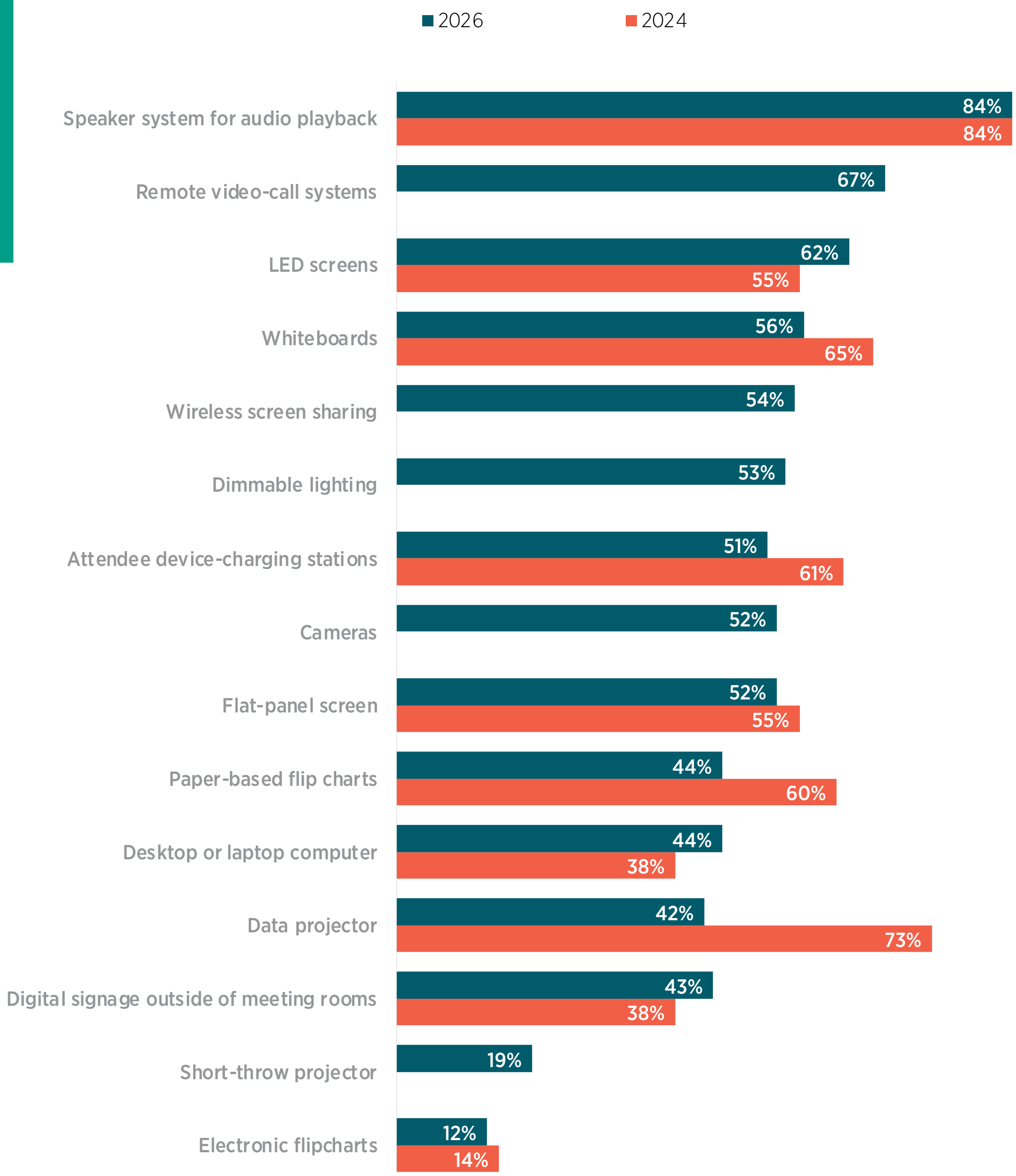
Figure 26: Investment plans in internet, hardware or both among percentage of venues, by region



After internet bandwidth and essential AV and IT equipment, the top technology investments are:

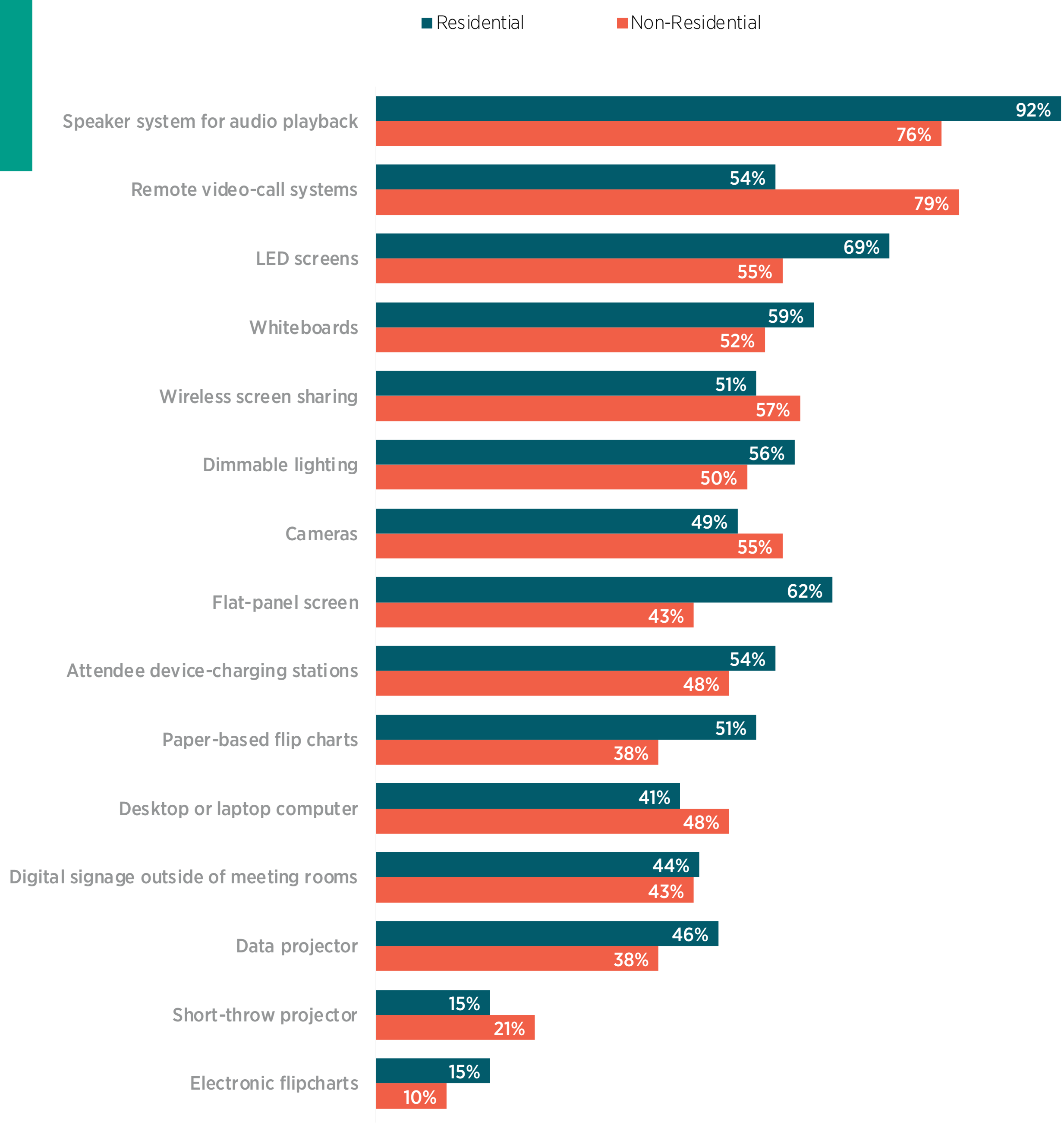
1. Speaker system for audio playback
2. Remote video-call systems
3. LED screens

Figure 27: A/V and IT equipment considered to be essential, by year



Residential and non-residential venues are more aligned this year on essential equipment than in previous editions of this report, but some variation exists. Residential venues are more likely to consider speaker systems, LED screens, whiteboards, flat-panel screens, device-charging stations for attendees and flip charts as essential. This is likely because they support a broader range of audio needs beyond hybrid meetings, such as music and "in-between" moments. Conversely, non-residential venues are more likely to prioritise remote video call systems, wireless screen sharing and cameras, potentially because of their role in hybrid setups.

Figure 28: Percentage of venues considering AV and IT equipment as essential, by type

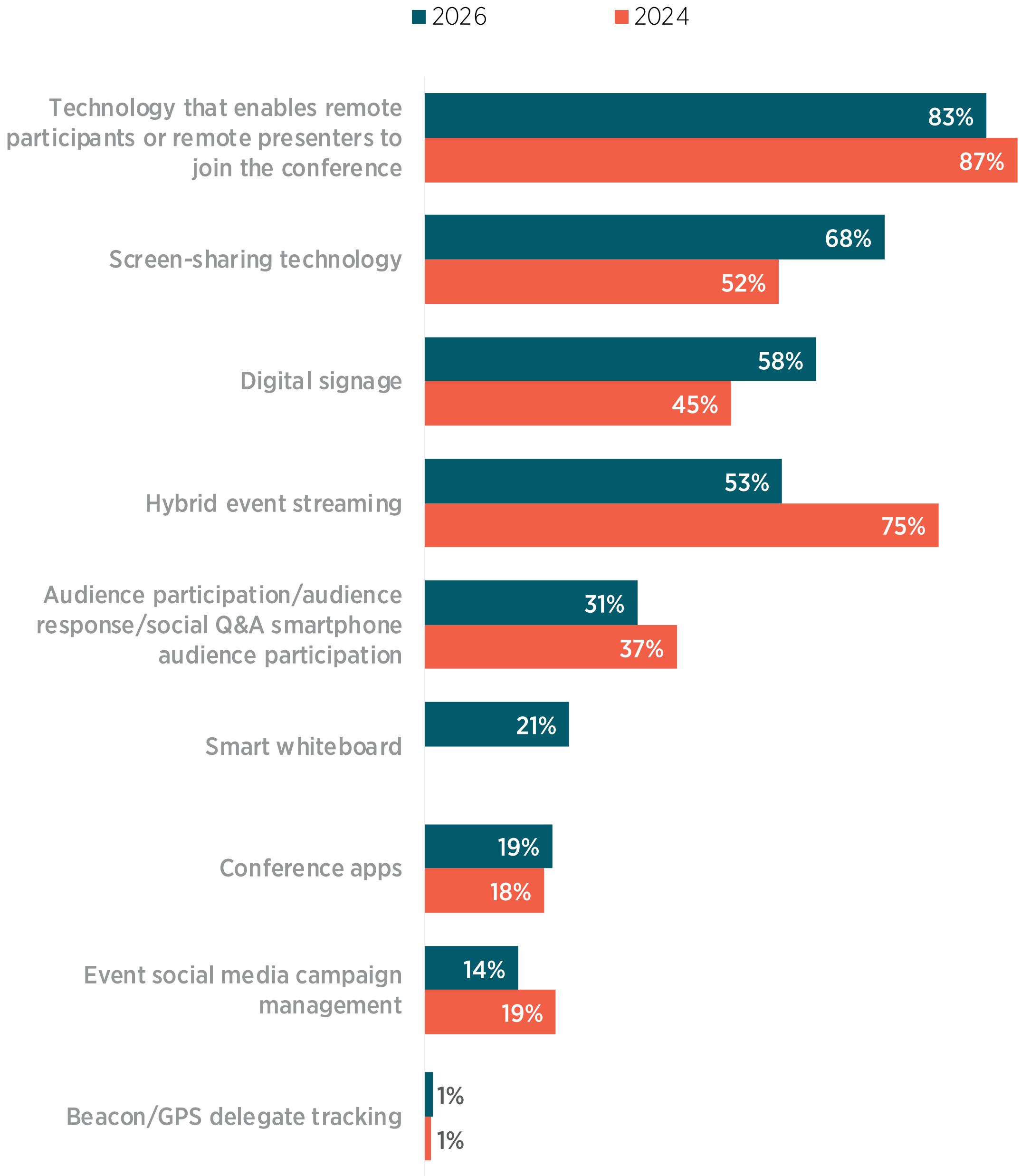


In addition to essential IT and AV equipment, venues employ various technologies, several of which increased in importance due to the pandemic and are now considered standard offerings. Venues most frequently adopt technology that enables remote participants and presenters to join the conference. However, hybrid event streaming, which was practically mandatory during the pandemic, is offered by only 53% of venues this year, down from the second-most-offered service during 2024.

Non-residential venues are more likely to offer digital signage and audience-participation technologies; residential venues are more likely to offer smart whiteboards and conference apps.

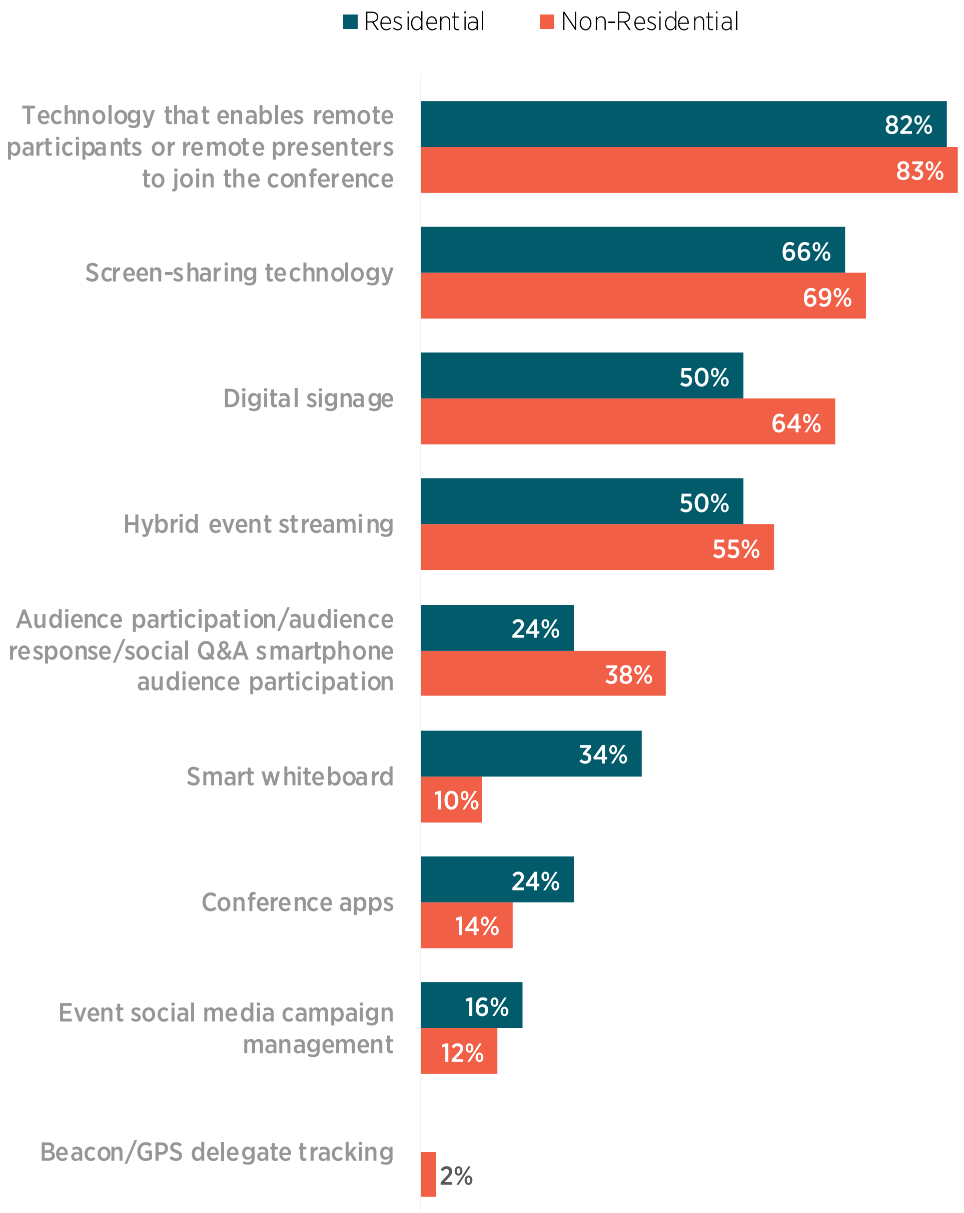
> “While technology remains essential, client expectations are shifting toward seamless, invisible delivery rather than tech for its own sake. Increasingly, reliability, integration and support matter more than specific equipment, with AV needing to be fully device-agnostic and adaptable. In this context, AV is moving from a product to a core service utility.”
>
> ***—David Parker, Commercial and Events Director, Royal College of Physicians London & Liverpool, UK***

Figure 29: Technology-based products and services offered, by year



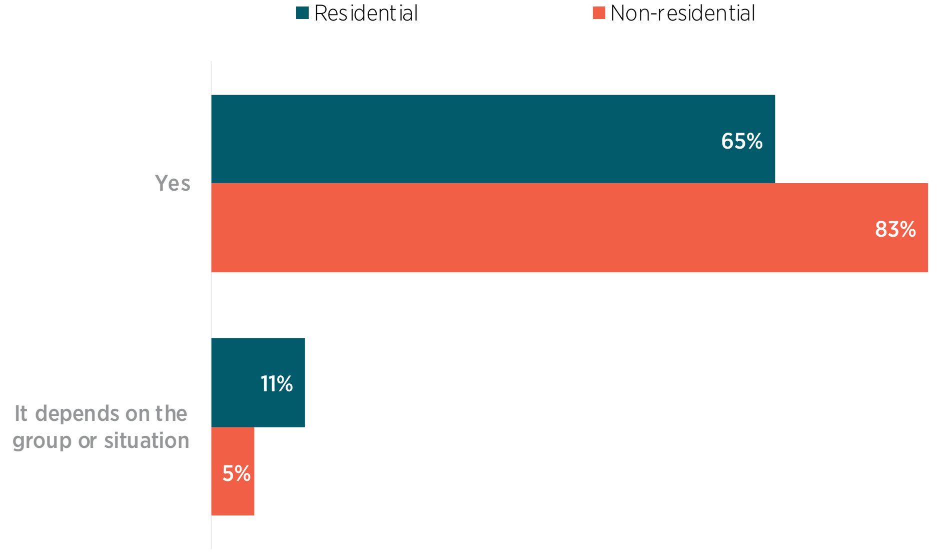
> "The promotion of recording and live streaming technology has declined among venues", notes Scott McLain, president at Waveguide. "Most events continue to use the technology and provide content to in-person attendees after the event. Events may be less hybrid, but recording and live streaming remain critical services for many venues."

Figure 30: Technology-based products and services offered, by venue type



A higher proportion of venues are choosing to fully outsource their AV equipment compared to 2024. Nearly all venues (96%) had equipment on-site during 2024. However, during 2026, that amount decreased to 79%. A smaller share of venues rent AV equipment.

Figure 31: Percentage of venues that guarantee bandwidth capacity as a standard offering



Technical support can be critical to successful meetings. Most venues include on-site tech support during meetings as a standard offering — 76% of them include it in their service for no extra charge and 10% include it as a chargeable service.

Asia Pacific venues are more likely to charge for on-site tech support; European and North American venues are more likely to include it in their fees.

> "In Asia Pacific, standard technical support is often included to help clients connect to AV, Wi-Fi and in-room presentation systems. But when an event has more complex requirements — such as an AGM, hybrid leadership briefing, online CPD exam or multicity rollout — specialist technical resources and project management are worth the investment. Dedicated technicians, rehearsals, contingency planning and client-specific infrastructure help ensure the technology supports the event's objectives, rather than becoming a risk to them. The key is transparency: Clients need to understand what is included, what is specialised and where additional support protects the success of the event."

—Vanessa Green, CEO, Cliftons Event Solutions, Asia Pacific

Figure 32: Percentage of venues with on-site tech support during meeting as a standard offering, by region

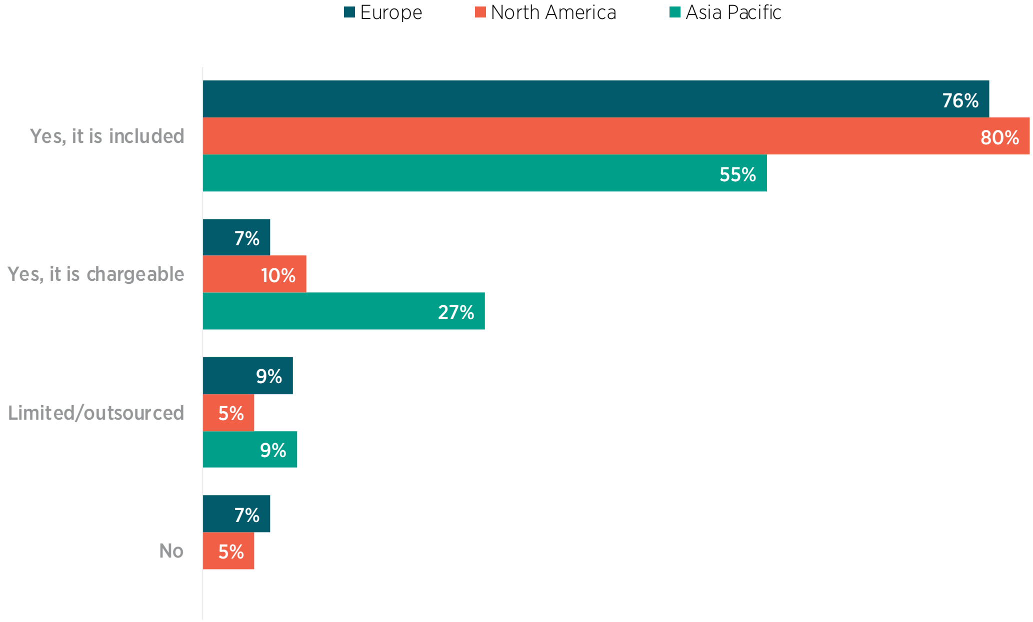
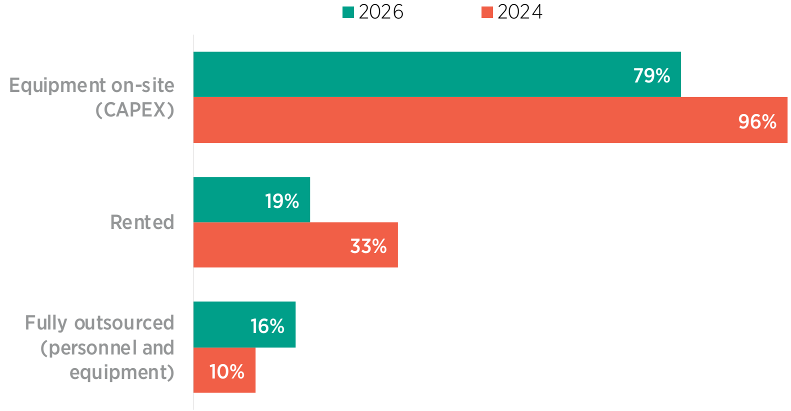
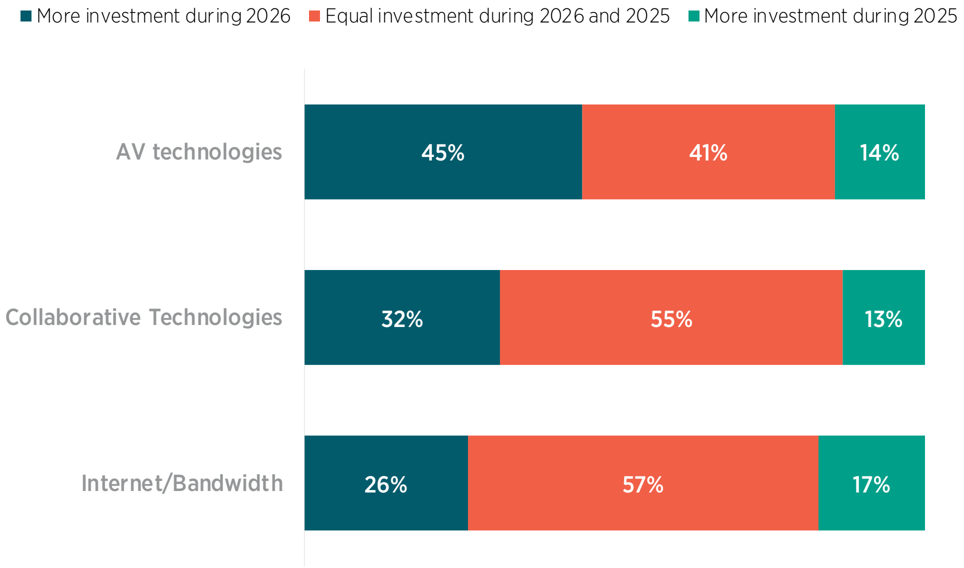


Figure 33: Percentage of venues on how AV equipment is acquired



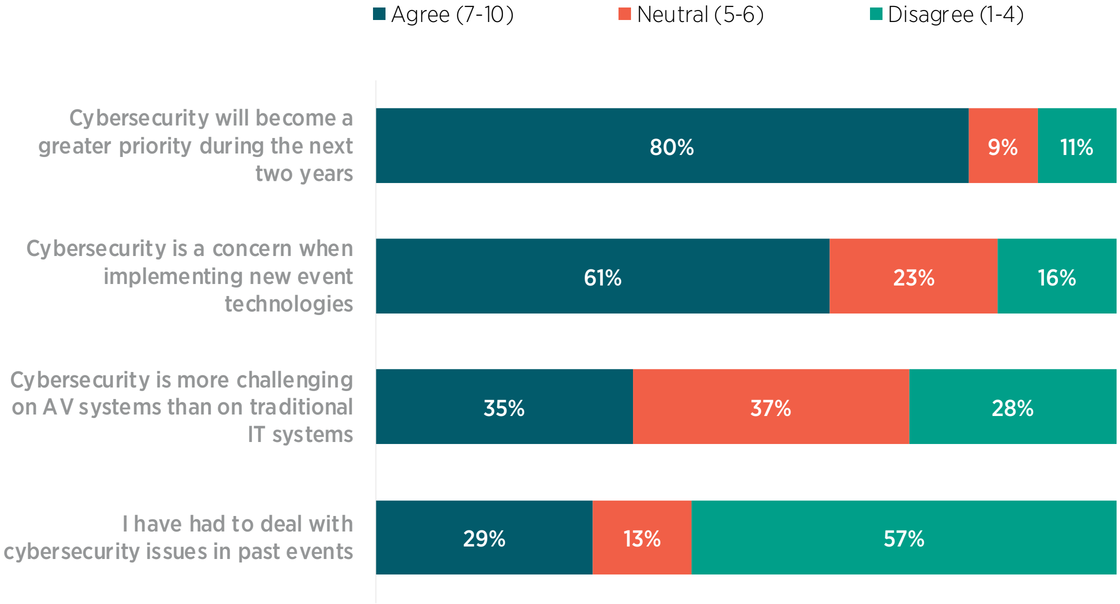
Venues are likely to continue their investments in AV and IT technologies. A larger share of venues plan to invest more this year than last year in bandwidth, AV and collaborative technologies.

Figure 34: Planned capital investment in select AV and IT technologies



The majority of surveyed venues believe cybersecurity will become a bigger threat during the next two years and will play a role when evaluating new technologies. Eighty percent of them believe cybersecurity will become a bigger issue during the next two years and will play a role when evaluating new technologies; 61% will consider these threats when they implement new technologies.

Figure 35: Percentage of venues agreeing with select statements on cybersecurity



When evaluating new investments, most venues will rely on on-site staff to evaluate the need for new technology and equipment. Residential venues had a higher share of venues using on-site technology support staff.

Figure 36: Party responsible for evaluating technology investment needs among venues, by venue type

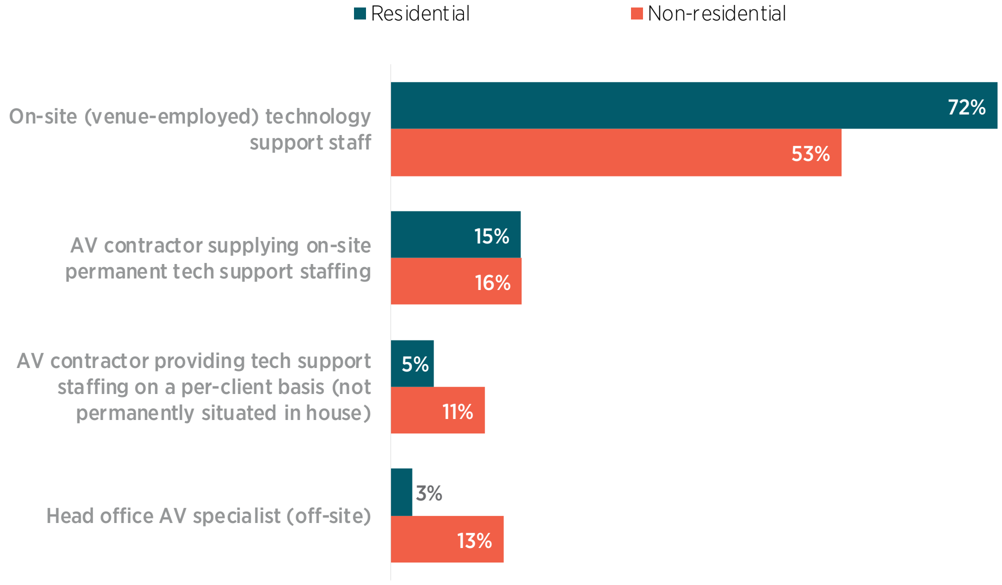
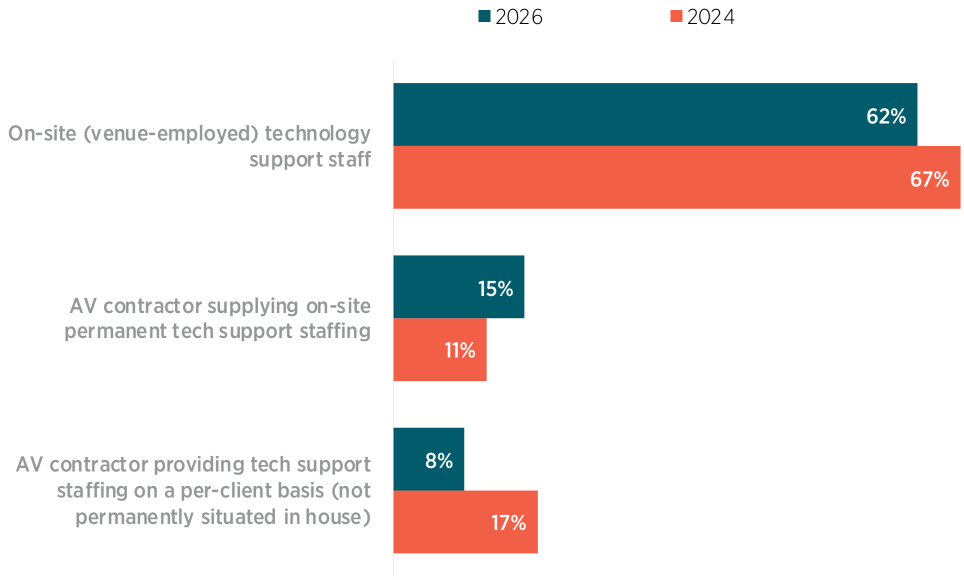


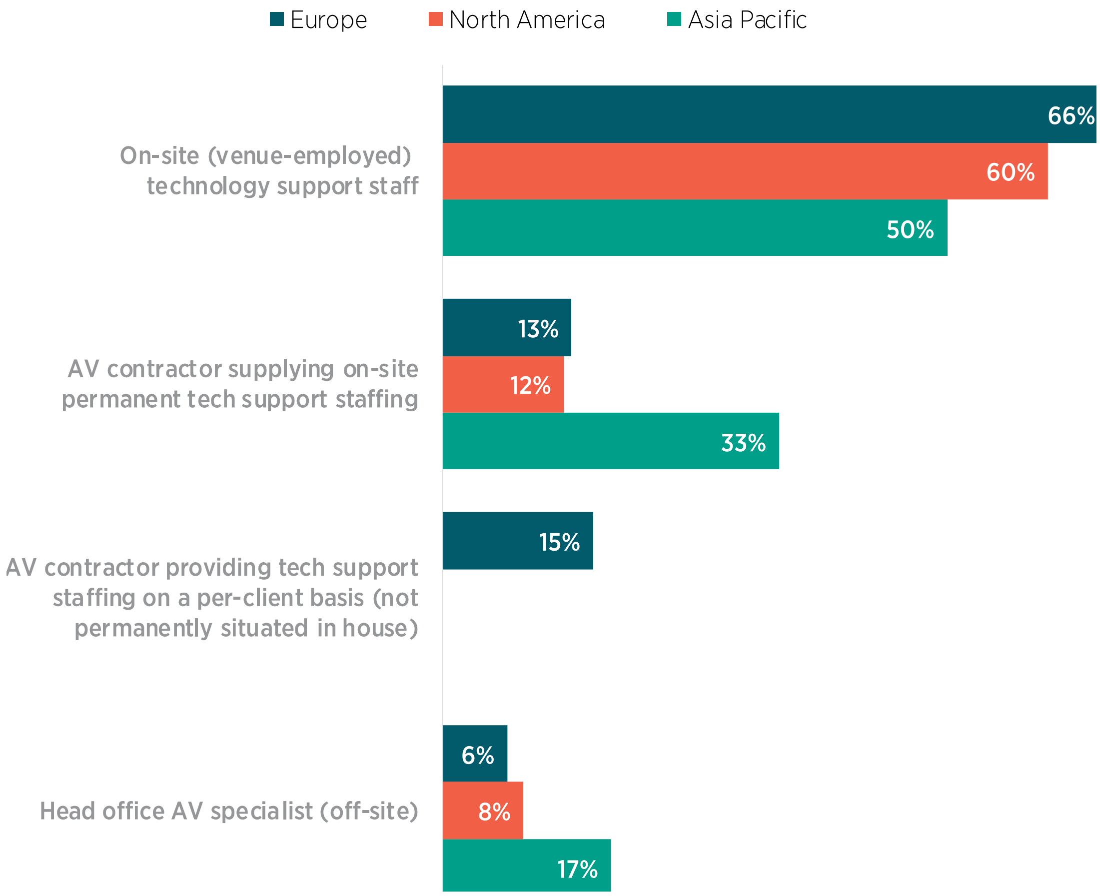
Figure 25: Does your evaluation of venues include a request for the carbon footprint measurement for your meeting at their venue?



A smaller share of venues during 2026, compared to during 2024, rely on AV contractors on a per-client basis to evaluate new technologies. This information suggests that venues might be moving toward a more-comprehensive venue-led supply of tech support via a contracted AV partner.

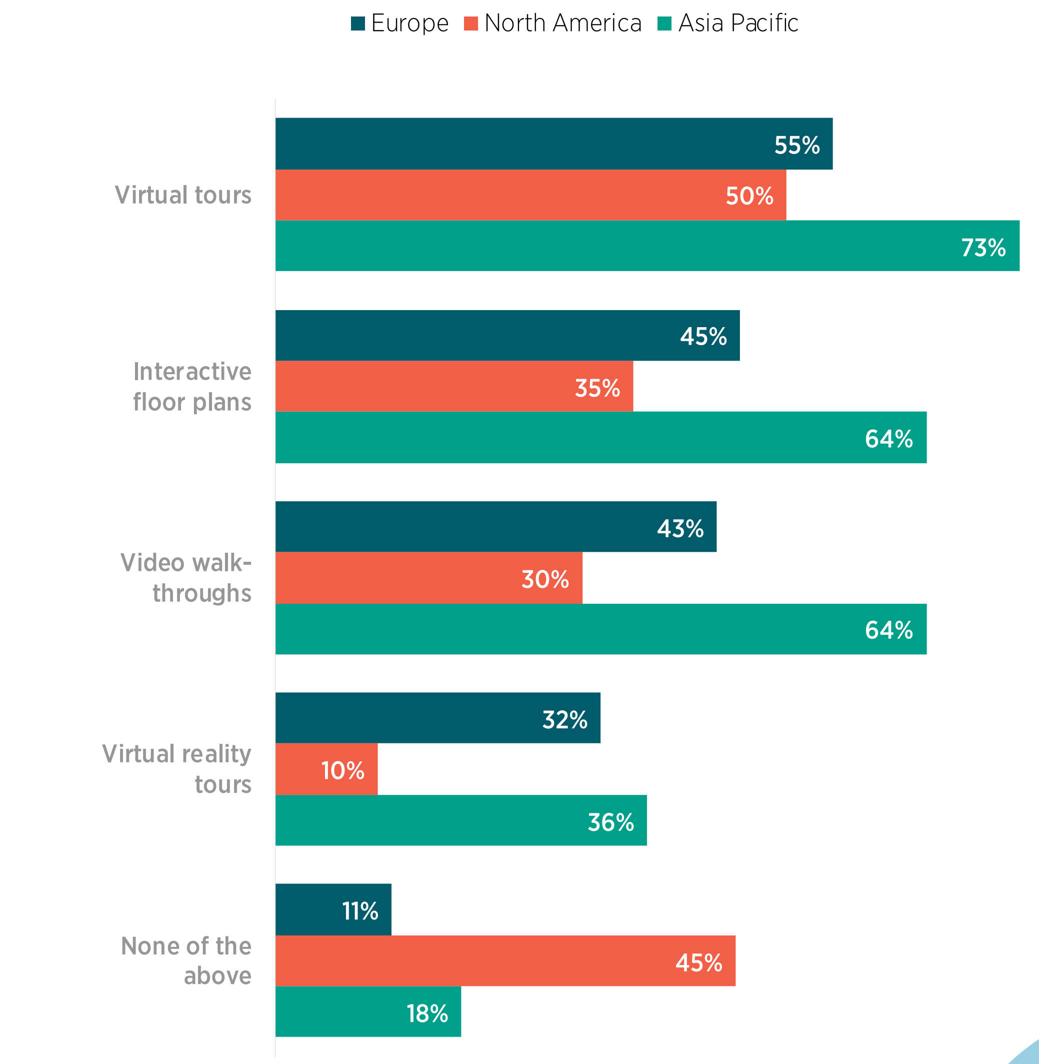
European venues were the most likely to be using on-site technology support staff, and Asia Pacific venues had, by far, the largest share of venues that use a permanent AV contractor or an off-site AV specialist in their head office.

Figure 38: Party responsible for evaluating technology investment needs among venues, by year



Asia Pacific venues are leading in the use of digital marketing tools, such as virtual tours, interactive floor plans and video walk-throughs. North American venues are far more likely to report using none of these tools. As a result, venues that have already invested in immersive digital content might widen the gap on competitors that have not. These tools soon might become a standard expectation for planners who evaluate venues remotely, particularly in Asia Pacific, where adoption is highest.

Figure 39: Percentage of venues using digital tools for venue marketing, by region

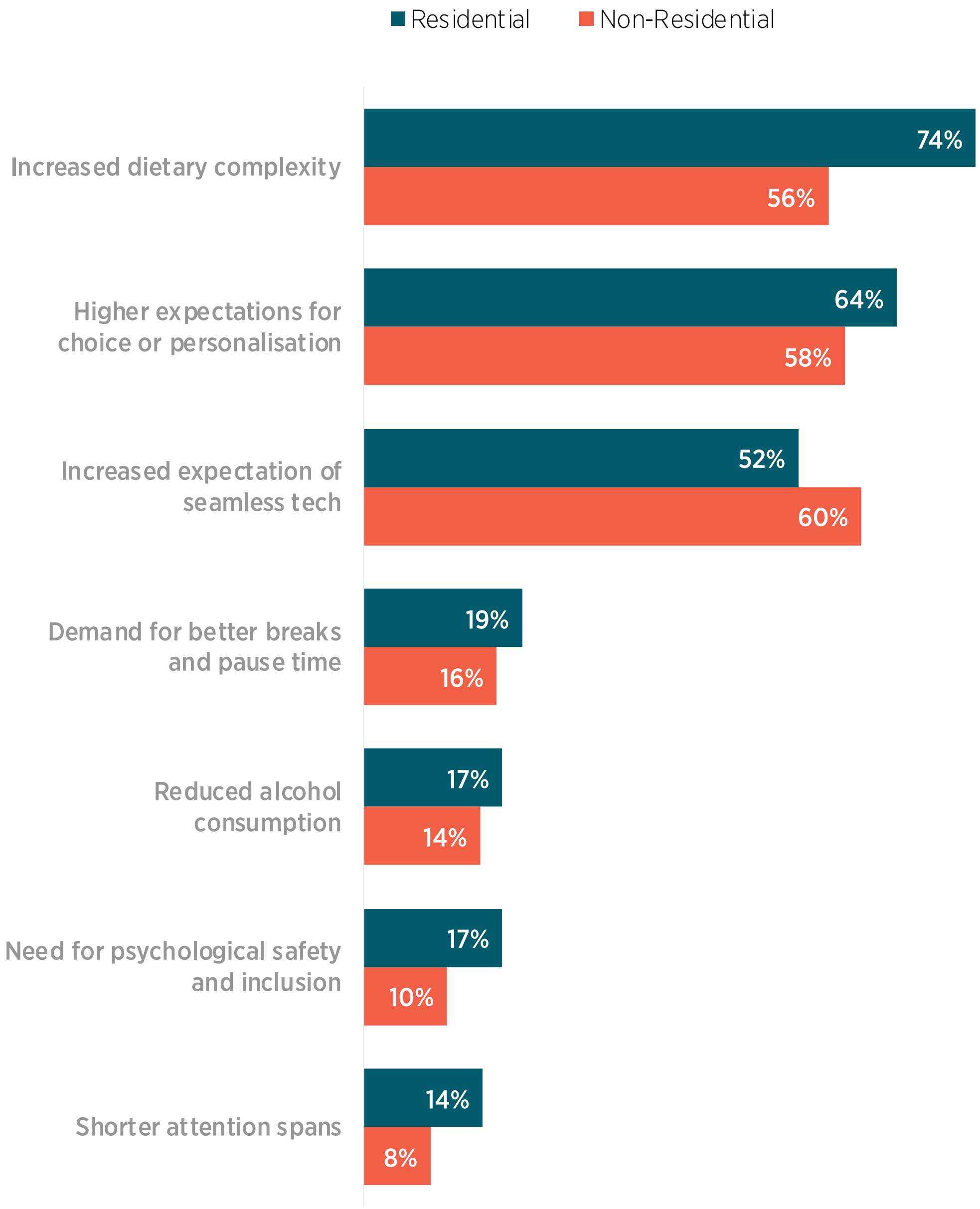


"In markets like Asia Pacific, planners already expect to experience a space before they make a decision. North America is catching up and needs to move faster. Immersive experiences, including virtual tours and interactive floor plans, aren't a premium anymore; they are a requirement. The venues moving ahead are the ones whose content is discoverable: AI-discoverable, customized for the buyer and built so a planner can stop watching a space and start planning inside it. The venues that understand this aren't waiting; they've made the investments already and are actively utilising immersive experience in their sales processes now."

—Jascha Kaykas-Wolff, CEO, Visiting Media

A constant increase in dietary complexity, higher expectations for choice and seamless tech, demands for break time, reduced alcohol consumption and shorter attention spans are impacting most surveyed venues. Increased dietary complexity and higher expectations for choice are impacting a larger share of residential venues, and increased expectations for seamless tech are more likely to impact non-residential venues.

Figure 40: Attendee behaviours most impacting service offerings and physical space design, by venue type



Food and Beverage Service

Food and beverage service is an integral part of an attendee's meeting experiences and is evolving over time. The greatest change continues to be additional increases in the number of requests to accommodate dietary preferences and to source locally produced food and beverage items whenever possible. A focus on sustainability initiatives is also top of mind for venues and meeting attendees.

Figure 41: Percentage of venues agreeing with select statements on food and beverage practices

Venue agreement with these statements aligns with our findings from 2024. Venues continue to face growing dietary demands and complexity, and they strive to use local ingredients and showcase sustainable methods. About half of venues surveyed report increased evening services beyond bar offerings and more themed and specialty events.

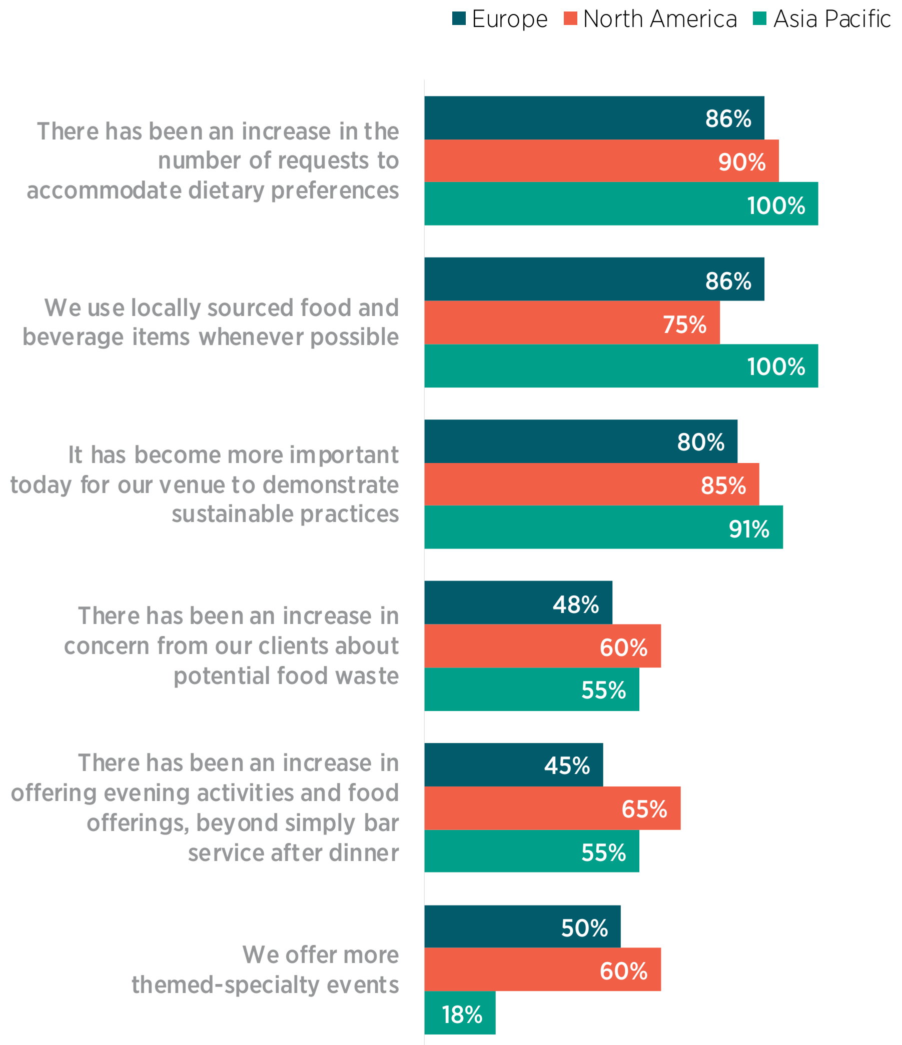
“Locally sourced food and beverage items can be an important part of food and beverage programs at venues, but they speak more to the desire from consumers for an experience that is unique rather than ‘cookie-cutter.’ Not only do locally sourced items and ingredients suggest freshness, quality and sustainability, but also uniqueness and something only available in that location. Being able to draw in elements that speak to the unique location of the venue will help make that experience stand out as something special.”

—Maeve Webster, President, Menu Matters

A high level of agreement exists among residential and non-residential venues about the importance of how they view food and beverage service and their attention to sustainable practices. Non-residential venues are more frequently hearing about food-waste concerns from clients and are experiencing an increase in evening activities beyond bar service.

> "The biggest challenge our team faces is keeping up with the diverse dietary needs and preferences clients bring to their meetings these days. The range has really expanded to vegan, gluten-free, dairy-free, nut allergies, cultural restrictions and personal wellness diets. We're committed to accommodating everyone, but it means we have to coordinate closely with the culinary team, planners and service staff to make sure nothing gets missed. At the end of the day, we want every attendee to feel taken care of, and that takes a lot of communication and flexibility while still delivering a great food experience."
>
> ***—IACC member***

Figure 42: Percentage of venues agreeing with select statements on food and beverage practices, by region



Although venues adamantly try to satisfy their clients and manage costs, this practice is increasingly difficult to maintain as budgets decrease and dietary restrictions become more frequent and diverse. Although venues try to adhere carefully to portion sizes, use local ingredients or offer buffet and shared food options, limited budgets and varying dietary needs add complexity. Now that guests expect personalised service, finding the right balance among quality, service, expectations and cost is tougher for venues because of the variety of dietary requirements.

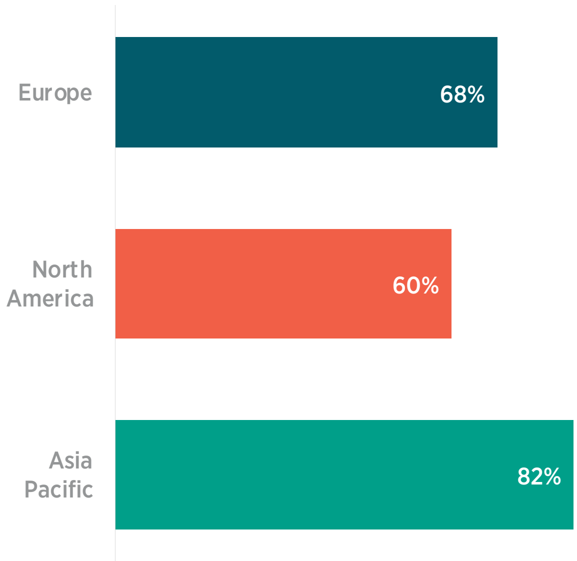
68%

Agree that higher food and beverage costs have impacted their venue's service.

"One of the main challenges we face is balancing increasing client expectations around food quality, dietary requirements and sustainability with the operational realities of conference catering. Another challenge is managing expectations around cost and value, as clients often want more premium or bespoke food experiences while still working within fixed meeting budgets. This has required us to design menus that remain creative and high quality while being efficient to deliver at scale."

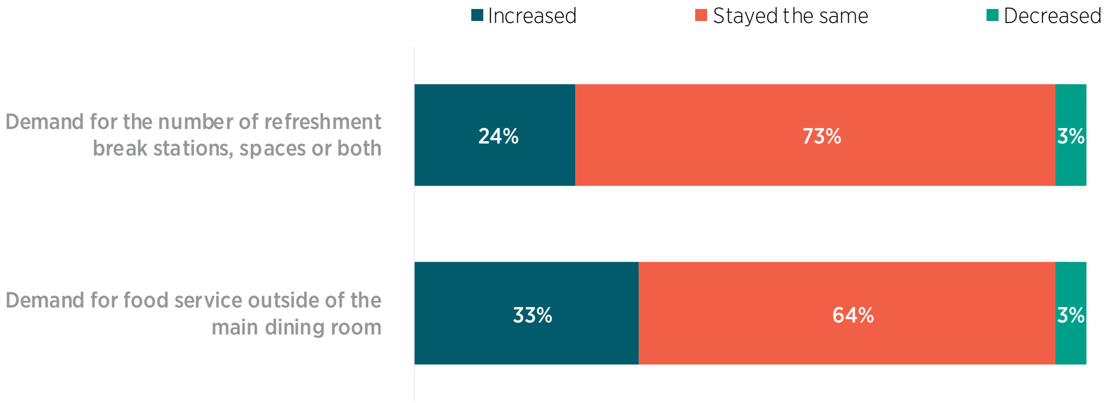
—IACC Member

Figure 43: Percentage of agreement that increased food and beverage costs impact service at venues, by region



While the demand for food service has stayed constant during the last two years for most venues, 33% of them have experienced an increase in the demand for food service outside the main dining room. Additionally, 24% of venues have experienced an increase in the number of refreshment stations.

Figure 44: Changes in food service demand during the last two years among venues



In addition to dietary restrictions, increased costs and service complexity are the biggest challenges that venues face in their food and beverage service. Non-residential venues are more likely to cite increased costs as a challenge. Residential venues are more likely to be concerned with guest satisfaction as the venues try to appease their guests' dietary restrictions.

Figure 45: Operational challenges created by dietary restrictions

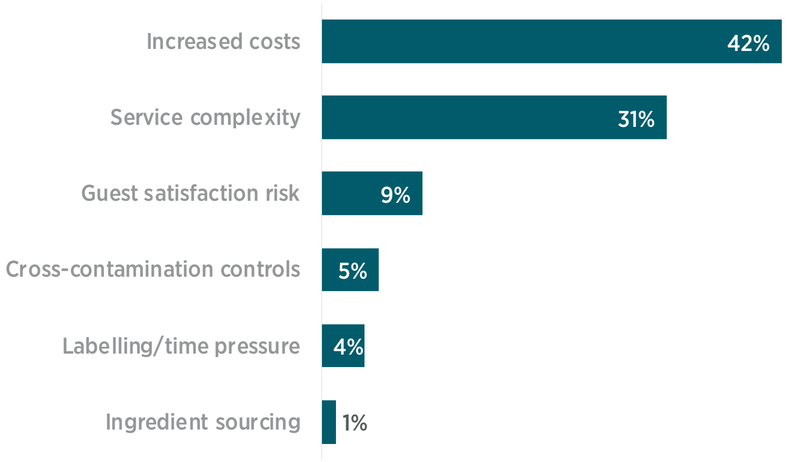
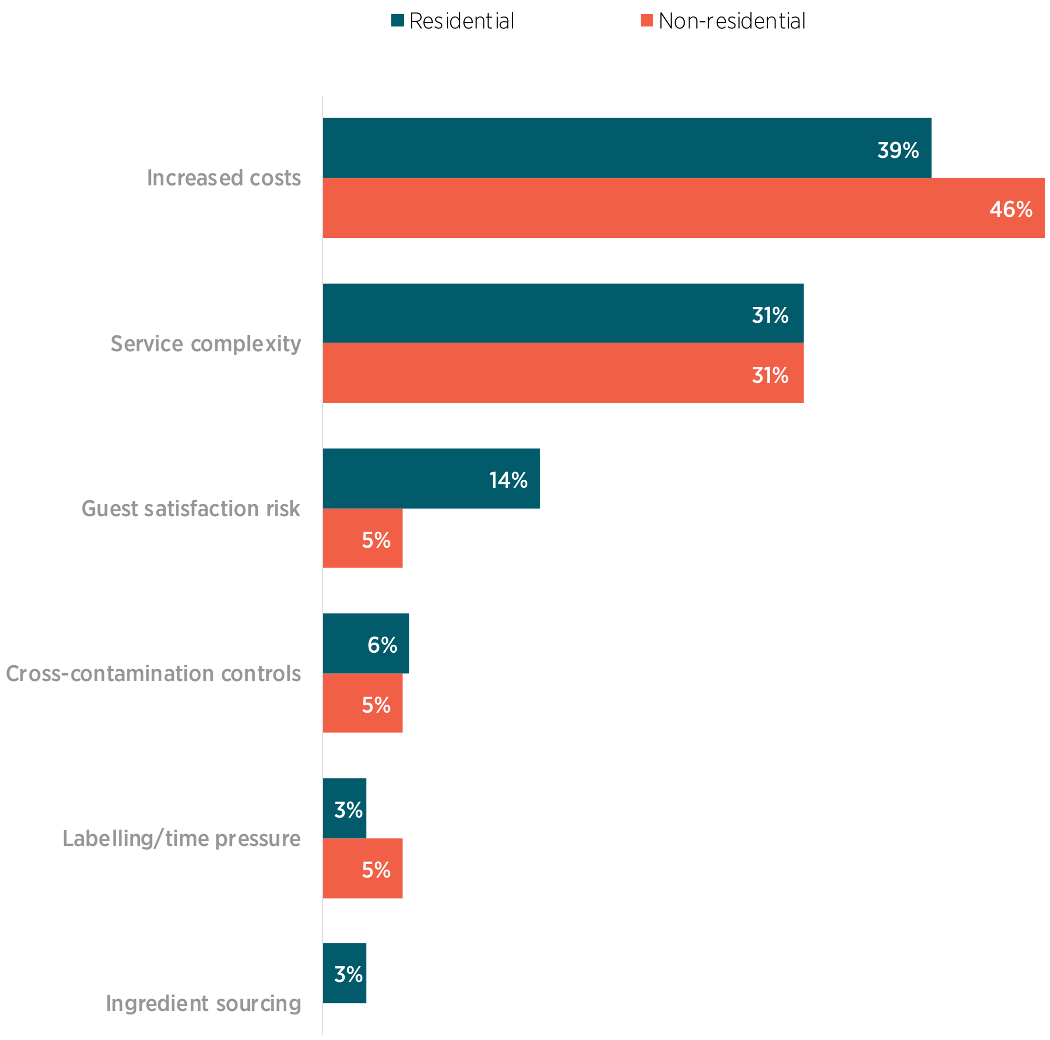


Figure 46: Operational challenges created by dietary restrictions



The consumption of alcohol continues to decline in venues, but a significant proportion of venues report no change in alcohol consumption. European venues are most likely to experience no change in the consumption of alcohol; Asia Pacific and North American venues are most likely to experience a decrease in consumption.

Figure 47: Percentage of venues reporting changes in the consumption of alcohol among attendees

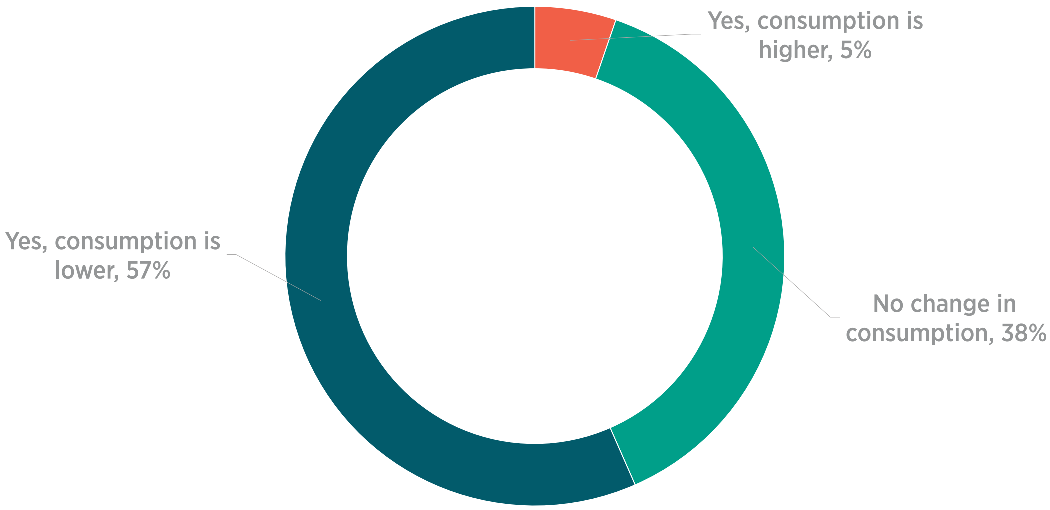
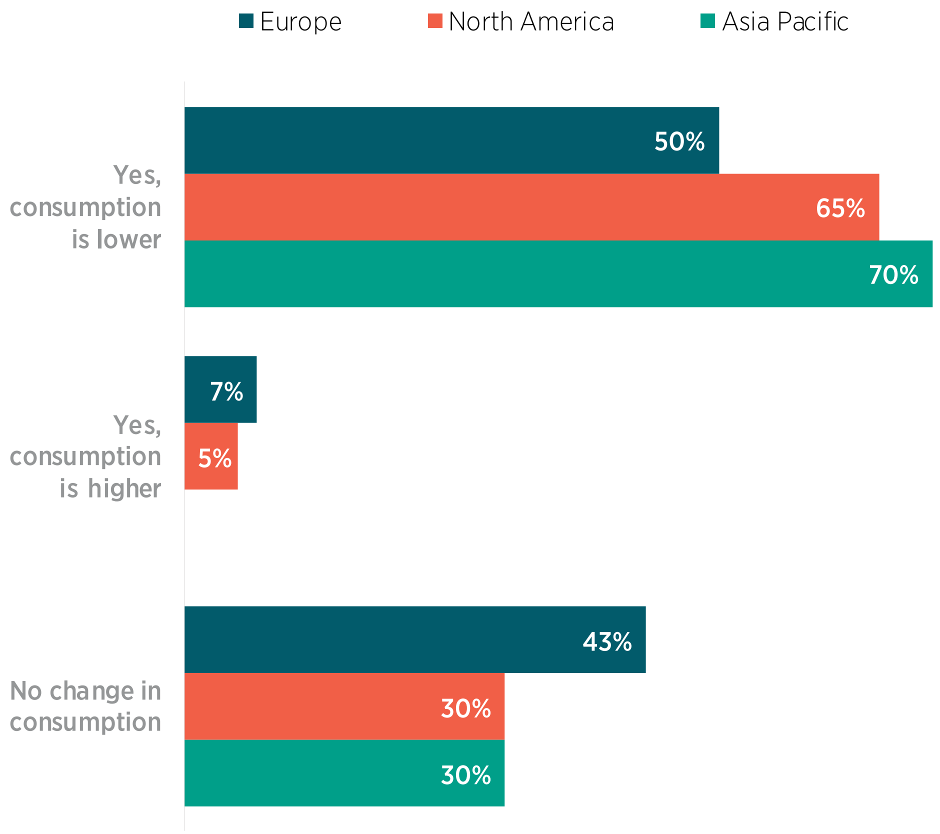


Figure 47: Percentage of venues reporting changes in the consumption of alcohol among attendees

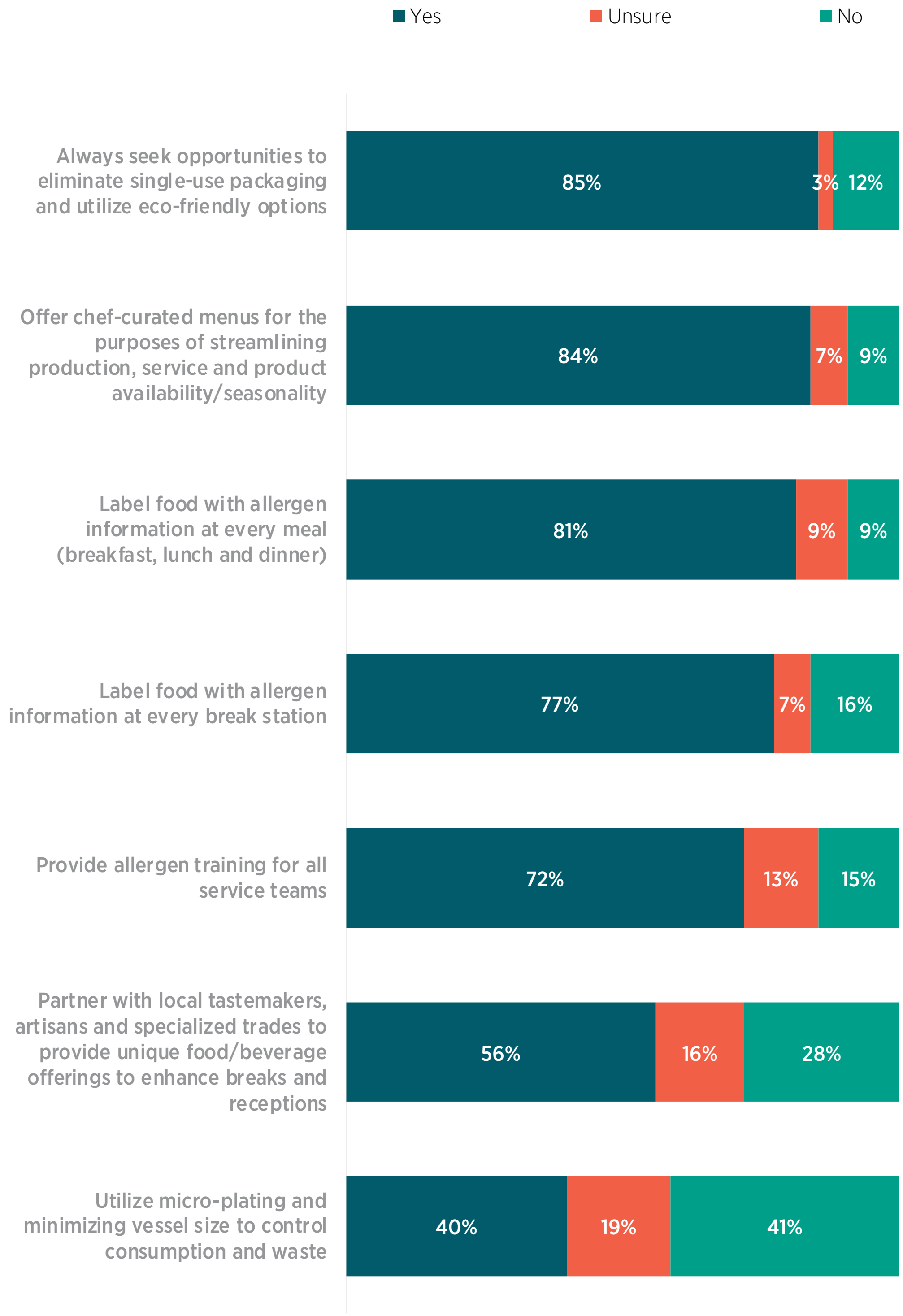


Food and beverage service is increasingly complex as venues strive to be eco-friendly, create seasonal menus and clearly label allergens at all times. Venues are looking for ways to reduce single-use packaging and simplify menu choices to improve efficiency. Most surveyed venues report that they consistently display allergen information at every meal and break station and that they ensure their service teams are trained on allergy awareness.

“U.K. legislation is advanced, but venues must sensitively distinguish between genuine dietary requirements and preference. For the RCP, cost pressures and sustainability expectations are already reshaping how F&B is designed and delivered, while unrealistic expectations on pricing and service remain a significant operational and commercial pressure. As a result, F&B is increasingly becoming a risk-heavy, margin-sensitive core service.”

—David Parker, Commercial and Events Director, Royal College of Physicians London & Liverpool, UK

Figure 49: Percentage of venues offering food allergen and waste programs



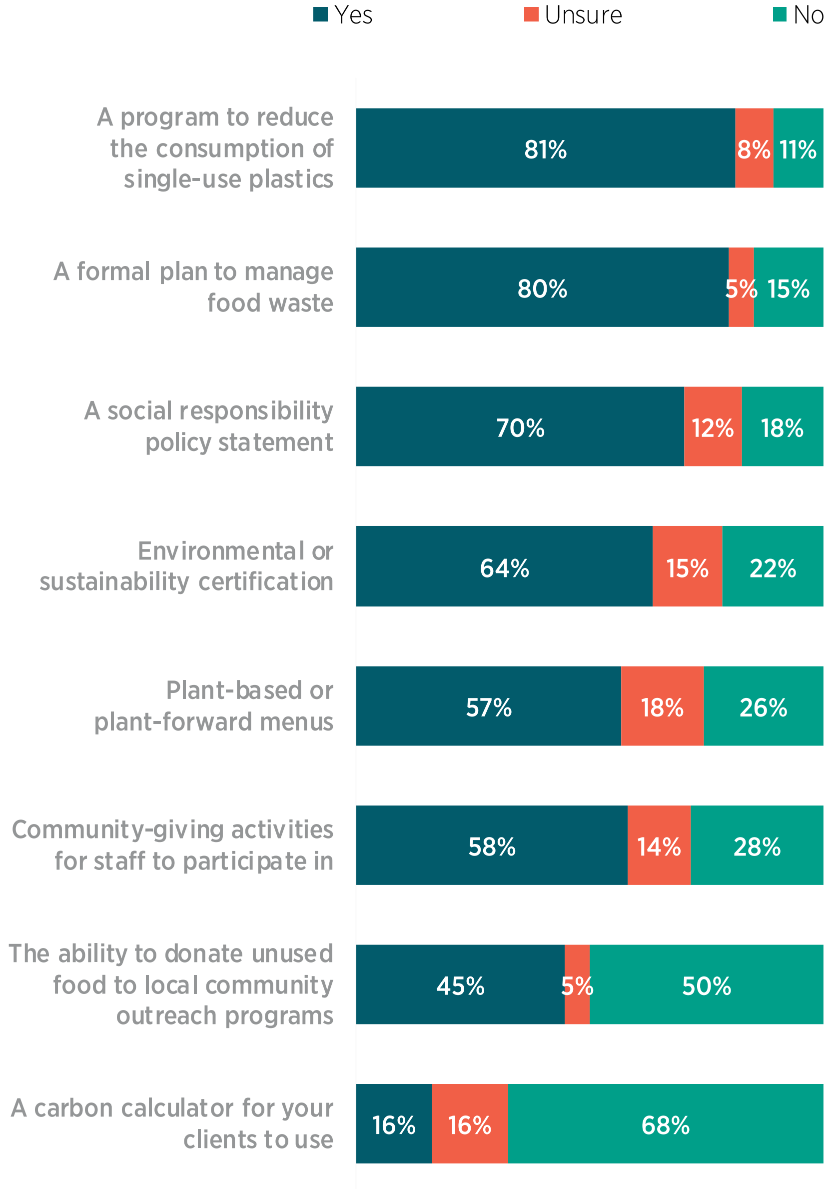
Venues' Responses to Issues of Sustainability

Because they have gained attention globally in all industries, environmental, social and governance (ESG) practices and goals have become more important to attendees and, in turn, to venues.

ESG goals are increasingly influencing how clients design their meetings. Some clients consider ESG a new standard that pushes venues to share their practices or add requirements for their events. However, not all clients are pushing for ESG goals, which forces some groups to resist adopting new sustainable practices.

> "We are seeing an increase in interest in how long our employees have been with the company. They are comparing years of employment as proof that it is a good place to work and that employees are treated well."
>
> ***—IACC Member***

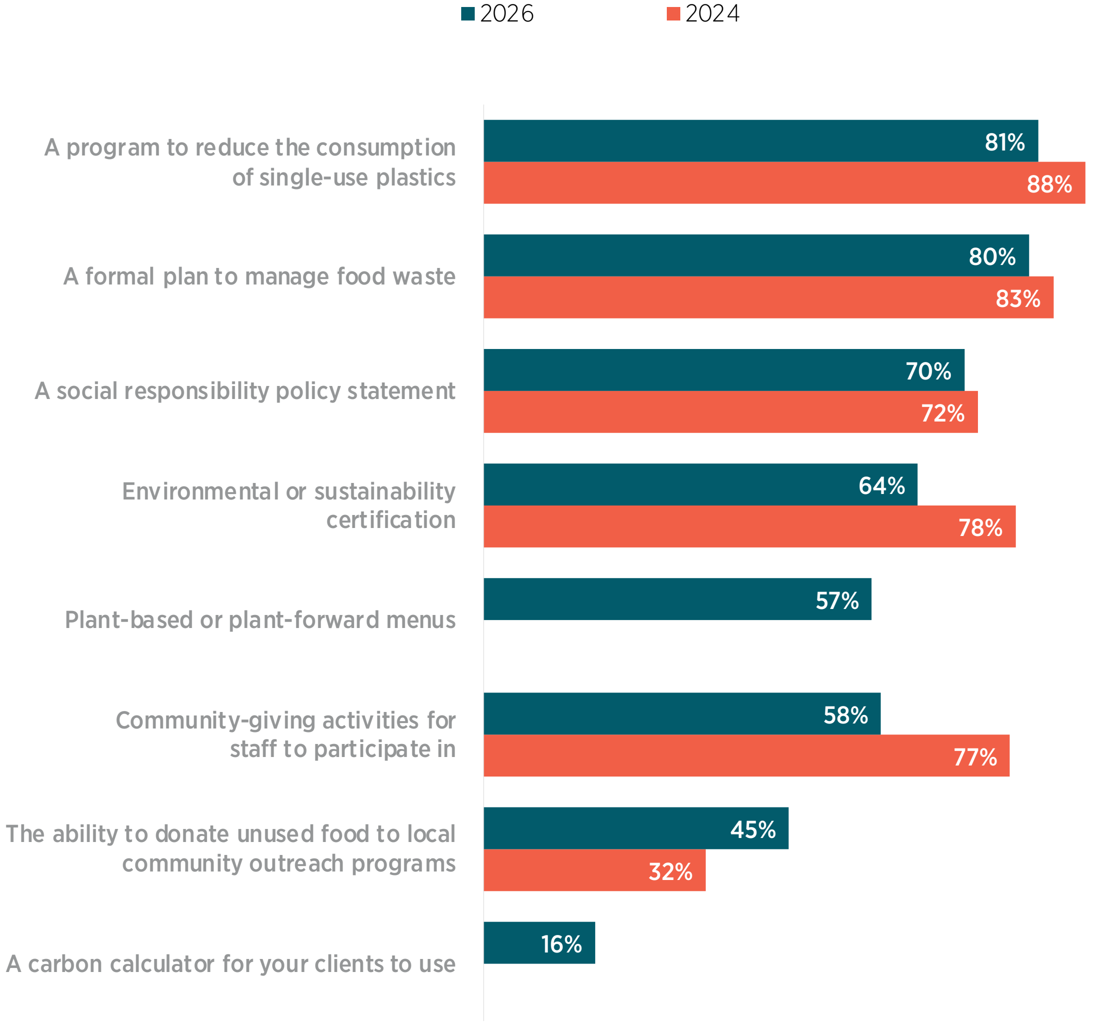
Figure 50: Percentage of venues offering sustainable practices



"Many companies now have firm sustainability and social-responsibility guidelines they're expected to follow, which carries over into how they plan their meetings and events. For us, that often means more requests for locally sourced menus, reduced waste, responsible packaging and clearer reporting on how we support those goals. Clients want to demonstrate to their internal teams that they're meeting corporate standards, so they're asking more questions and seeking partners who can help them stay compliant. Overall, ESG goals aren't just an added consideration anymore; they've become part of the planning process, and clients rely on us to help them align their events with those commitments."

—IACC Member

Figure 51: Percentage of venues offering sustainable practices, by year



"Meeting professionals are becoming more deliberate about food waste prevention and increasingly expect venues to do the same. Rather than focusing solely on post-waste composting or donation, planners are asking venues to prioritize prevention through smarter portioning, smaller vessels and menus designed to eliminate items that consistently go uneaten. As new guidance from the U.S. Food Waste Pact and World Wildlife Fund gains traction, planners are recognizing their influence and embedding food waste expectations directly into the planning and RFP process."

—Jessie States, CMP, CMM, Vice President of consulting for Meeting Professionals International

Locally sourced food and beverage is the most-likely request for sustainability from clients. Residential venues are more likely to receive this request than non-residential venues. Conversely, non-residential venues are more likely to receive requests for food waste and plastic usage reductions.

Figure 52: Types of initiatives requested by clients

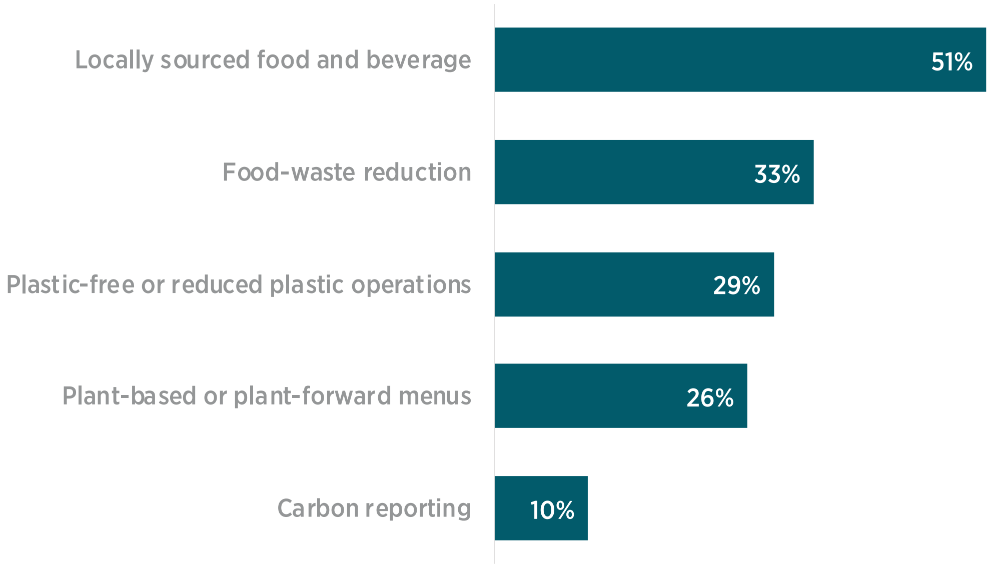
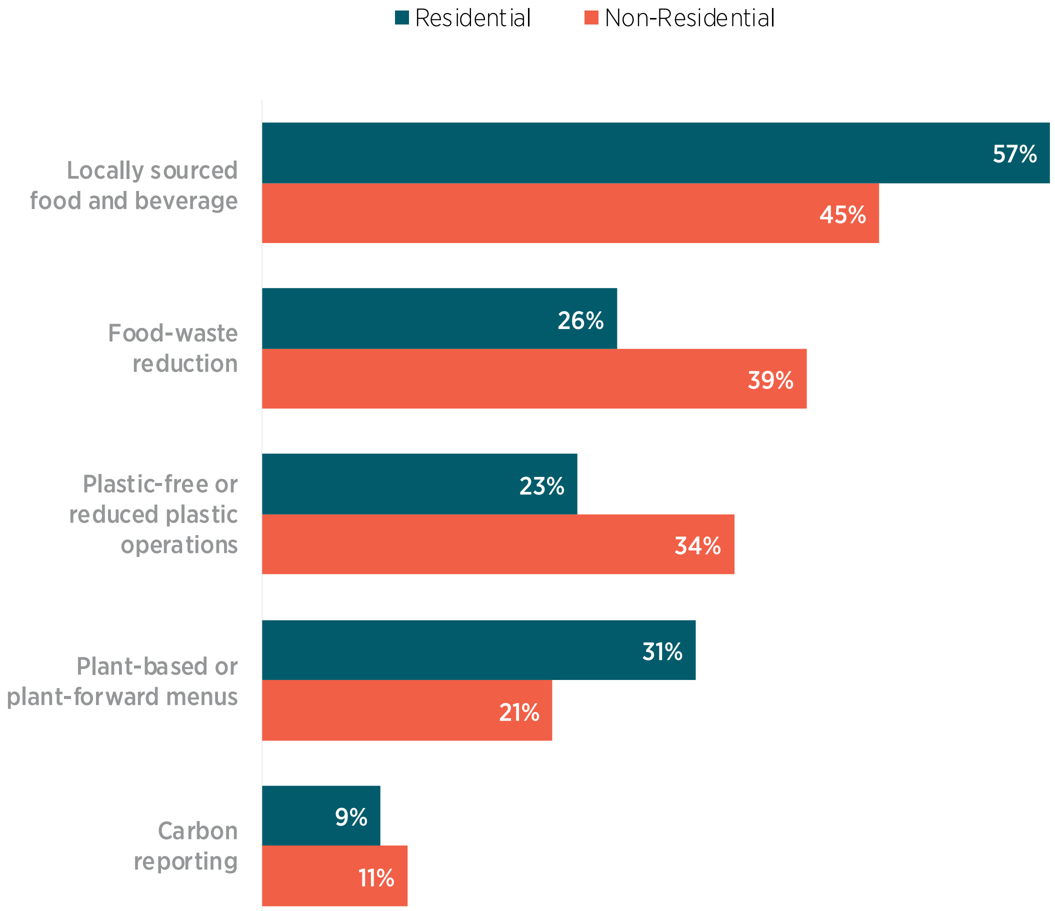


Figure 53: Types of initiatives requested by clients



Conclusion

The business events and meetings industry continues to evolve at pace, shaped by changing attendee expectations, emerging technologies, evolving workplace cultures and growing pressure to deliver measurable value from every organisational gathering. The findings within this year's Meeting Room of the Future report demonstrate that successful venues are those willing to continually adapt, experiment and invest with purpose — balancing innovation with practicality while remaining focused on the attendee experience.

As the industry becomes increasingly competitive, the importance of staying closely connected to emerging trends, behavioural science and peer-to-peer collaboration has never been greater. Understanding how people learn, connect, engage and collaborate within meeting environments is now fundamental to designing effective business events that deliver meaningful outcomes.

Industry research and shared knowledge play a critical role in helping venue operators, event planners and business event leaders make informed decisions about future investments, service delivery and experience design. Those organisations that remain engaged with industry dialogue, evolving client expectations and global best practices will be best positioned to future-proof their venues.

One of the defining strengths of the IACC community is its culture of collaboration and openness. Across the association's global membership, venue operators regularly share ideas, innovations, operational strategies and lessons learned to help one another navigate change and identify opportunities with greater confidence. This collective spirit enables venues to take calculated, informed approaches to investment and innovation while continuing to raise standards across the meetings industry.

The Meeting Room of the Future

IACC is a community of passionate people and companies delivering innovative and exceptional meeting experiences.

ABOUT IACC: Founded in 1981, IACC is a not-for-profit association dedicated to promoting understanding and awareness of the meetings venue industry and to giving member properties the tools necessary to provide an exceptional IACC meeting experience. Active members meet a set of stringent quality standards and agree to a code of ethics.

Currently, the association has 425 members from the United States, Canada, Australia, Japan, Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, France, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, England, Scotland, Finland, Ukraine, Hong Kong, New Zealand, The Netherlands and Germany.

For more information, visit the website at www.iacconline.org.

"There are meetings, and then there are IACC meetings."

IACC wishes to acknowledge those who have contributed to the funding of the IACC "Meeting Room of the Future" (TM) initiative.

How IACC Can Help You Stage Future-Proof Business Events

For Meeting Planners

For meeting planners seeking inspiring, high-performing venues for conferences, training programs, leadership meetings and business events, IACC's network of more than 400 venues across 19 countries represents some of the industry's most purpose-built and experience-driven meeting environments.

Every IACC-certified venue is required to meet globally recognised standards focused specifically on the business events experience — spanning meeting room design, technology, food and beverage service, sustainability, connectivity and customer experience. These standards are designed to help planners deliver meetings that are engaging, productive and memorable.

Meeting planners can explore IACC's global collection of certified meeting hotels and venues using the association's AI-driven venue search platform at IACC Venue Search Tool.

For Venue Operators and Corporate Leaders

Becoming part of the IACC community provides access to a global network of meeting-focused venues and professionals committed to continual improvement, collaboration and excellence within the business events sector. Through research initiatives, education, benchmarking, peer engagement and global networking opportunities, IACC helps venues remain informed and responsive.

Venue leaders interested in learning more about IACC certification and membership can explore additional information at IACC Membership Information.