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EXPRESS

MEETINGS & EVENTS

e-book

Meeting With Purpose



Change brings opportunity

In our newly evolved business world, daily commuters have been replaced by a hybrid workforce. When you stop to think about it, this widespread shift has had a significant economic, social, and societal impact. Business life that used to revolve around centralized offices in major cities is now looking different. And Forbes reported that city and suburban communities with lifestyle appeal but few professional jobs are expected to see population growth.¹ That could influence everything from housing to community services to corporate culture. If you're like many travel and meeting leaders today, you're probably wondering how to best position your company for future success in our new world.

In this e-book, you'll see why internal team meetings can be key to revitalizing your business and reconnecting dispersed employees. Industry findings and insights will provide you with strong evidence that face-to-face meetings among your teams are essential. So, when budget-minded finance directors challenge you to justify the need for internal meetings, you'll be better equipped to advocate for them and expand your meetings program.



Internal meetings are key

Given the link between a strong corporate culture and a company's long-term success, it's wise for business leaders to rethink the culture in their organizations. Strong company culture can help motivate employees. According to Gallup, culture can increase employee engagement when it's well understood.²

Having come out of The Great Resignation that left many feeling disengaged and unfulfilled at work, it's a good idea to increase the touchpoints that convey work culture. We're finding that the onset of a hybrid workforce has raised awareness of the importance of unifying teams face-to-face on a regular basis through more intentional meetings.

To support that view, we looked toward Robert C. Pozen, a professor at MIT Sloan School of Business. His standpoint is that:

"While remote work has its merits - bringing greater autonomy and work-life balance - building interpersonal trust is essential to team effectiveness and challenging when working remotely."

Professor Robert C. Pozen, a Business Leader in Productivity and Co-author of "Remote, Inc."

What we've learned over the last few years is that online meetings aren't a one-and-done solution when it comes to fostering collaboration and bonding employees to your brand. Also consider the level of engagement that happens naturally through in-person gatherings after weeks – if not months – of meeting through virtual platforms.

"Meetings are replacing the in-person office environment for companies that have gone largely remote after the pandemic," notes Linda McNairy, vice president of American Express Meetings & Events, Americas.

87% of global meetings are expected to have an in-person element in 2023, according to our 2023 Global Meetings and Events Forecast.³



Our 2023 Global Meetings and Events Forecast report emphasizes the value of internal in-person meetings. Not only are they an effective way to reinforce culture, but they can also bring a multitude of other benefits for employees and business leaders, such as:

- Enhancing productivity.
- Instilling corporate values.
- Driving employee wellness and retention.
- Improving team dynamics.
- Helping employees make advances in professional development.

Many employees are looking toward their employers to help them fill knowledge gaps or learn important skills. In fact:

70% of millennials and Gen Z workers want the support of their companies to build skills; otherwise, they're ready to resign, according to a report in [Fortune.com](https://fortune.com).⁴

Apparently, the readiness to resign isn't just an American phenomenon; it's a European one as well. McKinsey surveyed over 16,000 respondents in nine European countries and found that one-third of respondents are considering quitting their jobs.⁵

Lack of career development and advancement, as well as uncaring and uninspiring leaders, were among the top reasons Europeans gave for why they may leave. That builds a strong case for investing in skill development and supporting employees on their career climb. What makes employer support so appealing? McKinsey reported that new skills and competencies can result in a 30% higher pay increase, on average.⁶ With that in mind, let's look at some relevant industry perspectives on the readiness to hold in-person meetings.



A strong desire for in-person meetings across the globe

According to surveys and interviews from American Express Meetings & Events specialists, companies in regions across the globe are willing to spend money on internal meetings in 2023 with:

- 45% of meetings including overnight accommodations.
- 27% of meetings including international air travel.
- 40% of meetings in a city different from the corporate office.⁷

Our meetings and events specialists noticed in-person meetings and events spiked in 2022. In fact, internal meetings as well as small and simple meetings surpassed 2019 levels in certain regions according to our internal reports. We've noticed that meeting leaders are excited about the opportunities created through the interpersonal dynamics of meeting face-to-face. According to one US executive who was interviewed for our forecast report, "Meeting in person allows for more trust, accountability, and collaboration. And gathering in offsite conference rooms helps to eliminate office distractions."

"We were particularly struck by how many companies are planning internal meetings away from the office."

Linda McNairy, Vice President,
American Express Meetings & Events, Americas

Our meetings and events specialists were equally surprised to find that so many companies were planning for in-person meetings of 100 people or less, with the majority having a maximum of 50 people. In fact, demand has exceeded pre-pandemic levels. McNairy added some credible reasons to explain the surge:

"Face-to-face meetings play a vital role in strengthening company culture, employee wellness, professional development, employee empowerment, and client relationships."

The human element can't be replaced

Employee gatherings – whether they celebrate team accomplishments, involve an environmental cause, or a keynote speaker – can leave a more indelible impression than online meetings. You may not remember a discussion on your dashboard screen if your dog was barking in the background. But chances are, you'll remember the multisensory experience of a live discussion that you've attended with colleagues. As we look back on three years of virtual meeting fatigue, it's easy to see why a strong majority of our survey respondents anticipate that in-person meetings and the number of event attendees will increase.

72% of hybrid meeting attendees believe they'll get more value from the in-person experience. That was the finding from Business Travel News' "The Future of Meetings" report."⁸

New world. New roles. 2023 is a transformative time.

The rise in the hybrid workforce creates new opportunities for leaders to support in-person gatherings through more purposeful travel. Those who utilize travel and meetings as strategic investments in their employees can be the catalysts of change within their companies. By elevating their responsibilities, they can be cultural leaders, helping to unite a fragmented workforce.

"Clearly, the lack of an everyday, centralized workplace and infrequent face-to-face meetings can leave dispersed colleagues feeling uncommitted and that mindset can hinder business success."

Gerardo Tejado, Senior Vice President, Professional Services and General Manager of American Express Meetings & Events

According to Gallup research, at least 50% of the US workforce are "quiet quitters," meaning they're putting in bare-minimum effort – but nothing more – to get their job done. An article from Gallup stated that lack of engagement often starts when company culture doesn't deliver on employment promises like prioritizing well-being. The article revealed that disinterested employees are not only unproductive but expensive.⁹

Unengaged employees cost the world \$7.8 trillion in productivity according to Gallup's State of the Global Workplace 2022 Report.¹⁰



In light of that fact, we turned to one of our clients to learn more about his challenges and views on in-person meetings. Due to financial pressures from upper management, he was asked through email to limit the frequency of his team's internal meetings. Here's how he replied:

"I believe wholeheartedly that these meetings are absolutely necessary for our region to grow and collaborate. What I quickly realized in our recent meeting was that we have major internal issues with isolation, collaboration, and growth. These issues have been masked because we have been meeting virtually for the past two years. We were able to speak open and honestly about those issues, which never would've happened had we not all been in the same room.

Furthermore, a recent article by the Harvard Business Review indicates that research has identified that discussing topics unrelated to work is one of the most important activities for high-performing teams. During breaks and meals, our meetings give the team that opportunity. Before the pandemic, we did this several times a year and what I can truly tell you is that it increased collaboration. People knew each other better. Trust was developed. They held each other accountable and people were willing to work more with one another. All of that collaboration has eroded over the pandemic as people work at home, meeting virtually. Those personal conversations don't occur over video or phone. It's only when we're meeting face-to-face do those type of relationships develop."

Rebuilding social capital

Diving deeper into Harvard Business Review's (HBR's) findings, we found some convincing reasons to support our client's view. In an HBR article titled "High-performing Teams Don't Leave Relationships to Chance," it's noted that colleague connections are more than a nice-to-have. They can lead to more productive, creative, and collaborative employees.¹¹

It benefits leaders to take a proactive role in improving relationships at work. In-person collaborative sessions promote discussions on shared work goals and personal interests, allowing colleagues to find common ground. They help create connected experiences that benefit employees on a business and personal level. Through strong ties to colleagues, employees have the foundation to fill knowledge gaps and develop innovative solutions. It's more than likely they'll also feel happier overall. Happier employees stick around longer.

Employees who feel more connected to colleagues in their networks are more likely to report being engaged at work and report feeling a sense of belonging at work, according to McKinsey research.¹²

After the widespread impacts of The Great Resignation, it's interesting to learn what job-seeking candidates really want from their employers. Findings from Inc. Magazine show they want a company that values mental health and work-life balance.¹³ They're looking for a work culture that prioritizes these areas over the daily work grind. From our standpoint, in-person meetings that foster a sense of community can help fulfill those desires and support employees' well-being.



An inclusive workplace

Individuality is another factor to consider. When employees feel their unique identities are respected, they're more likely to feel empowered in their roles. Having a sense of self-worth can contribute to greater achievements. In fact:

Korn Ferry research reveals that inclusive teams make better decisions 87% of the time.¹⁴

It's up to leaders to help employees realize their full potential by creating a workplace where they can feel free to be their authentic selves – where their unique contributions are valued and appreciated. Given the isolation of working from home, it's more important than ever to let them know their ideas are being considered.

73% of surveyed employees say they're enabled to perform their best when they feel their voices are heard, according to Korn Ferry's research on Salesforce.¹⁵



Through face-to-face meetings, leaders provide employees the opportunity to get their ideas out there. Yet optimizing in-person meetings requires a strategy. Professor Pozen provides some tips and guidance.

Key insights from a leader in productivity, Professor Pozen

Professor Pozen found that many business leaders are looking for the optimal plan for their new hybrid workforce. He often heard questions like:

- How frequently should colleagues meet face-to-face?
- What is the most productive agenda?

His view is that the appropriate decision-making unit is the team, not the company and not the individual. According to the professor, each team has a different agenda, so you don't want to have a uniform rule. He recommends using the acronym FLOCS to guide your decisions. Its meaning can be broken down like this:

- F Function
- L Location
- O Organization
- C Culture
- S Scheduling

FLOCS

Function: Consider whether the team requires creativity, brainstorming, close coordination, and negotiation. Those types of functions require more frequent in-person meetings. On the other hand, roles such as software developers and writers that call for a high degree of concentration thrive best with some alone time.

Location: Ask yourself: Do most teams live around the office? If so, it's probably easier to get them together on a more frequent basis. For more geographically dispersed employees, choose a location that's conveniently accessible to everyone.

Organization: Give thought to the type of work involved. Does it involve in-person collaboration between cross-functioning teams? If you want employees to interact a lot, it's best if they meet at the office regularly or another convenient location.

Culture: Before the age of the hybrid work model, a lot of social capital was already built into the corporate structure. Junior executives worked alongside senior executives and there was chitchat at the elevator or lunchroom. That corporate camaraderie is sorely missed but Pozen feels it can be reignited through purpose-driven in-person meetings.

"Senior people should let the junior people speak up instead of using the entire meeting as their speaking platform. That can benefit new hires who worked from home since their start date."

Professor Robert C. Pozen, a Business Leader in Productivity and Co-author of "Remote, Inc."

Scheduling: Best practice is to have teams decide on the days and frequency of in-person meetings since they're the participants. Whatever cadence is suggested, everyone on the team should agree on it. In terms of scheduling, there should be adequate time for organized and informal meetings that bring about casual chitchat. Pozen recommends communicating past projects and events via email and using in-person meetings as the platform for forward-looking discussions.

These regularly scheduled meetings work well whether you have local teams that are centered around the office or more geographically dispersed teams. In general, it's best to schedule meetings for 60 minutes or less and utilize the time wisely by:

- Keeping them to 6 to 8 people if possible.
- Holding them in the smallest meeting space possible to foster a tighter sense of community.
- Having a specific agenda that:
 - Starts with an introduction.
 - Provides colleagues time to team up for discussion.
 - Closes with action items, making everyone aware of next steps, who takes them, and timeline to complete them.
 - Includes a meal or activity that promotes team bonding and non-work-related conversations.



Recent hires

In the past, new hires got a firsthand look at corporate culture because they started and ended their days at the office. Now that the workforce has gone largely hybrid, newcomers in junior roles don't have as many opportunities to learn from veterans. Pozen recommends that managers schedule one-on-one time in the office – if possible – with direct reports at the start of their positions. And there are several reasons why it benefits managers to continue face-to-face meetings as both one-on-one and team sessions with employees. In-person meetings can provide an open forum to:

- Facilitate interpersonal communication that leads to shared understanding.
- Pick up on nonverbal cues that often go unnoticed in virtual sessions.
- Support one another through projects.
- Address sensitive topics.
- Limit the distractions of home.
- Alleviate feelings of isolation.

In his talks with business leaders, Pozen sees a strong desire from new hires to meet with veterans to get a sense of what corporate culture is all about. From his perspective, companies can empower short-tenured employees and instill confidence by giving them the opportunity to speak at team meetings. Partnering with a mentor – like a seasoned employee in a leadership role – is another way newcomers can be supported throughout their career journey.

Local employees living near the office can easily meet at the office a few days a week but what about more geographically dispersed employees? Pozen's view is that an offsite meeting space or hotel works best. Offsites can work for several different purposes, including larger team meetings hosted by global companies.

Insights for large companywide meetings & events

In recent past, we've seen tourist destinations utilized for large corporate meetings and events and there are signs that the trend will continue in 2023. Offsite meetings can provide a meaningful touchpoint for collaboration. Putting the time and energy into planning for offsite meetings at an inspiring location can have positive ripple effects later on.



From Pozen's perspective, it's best if the entire company is present at an offsite gathering so that people get familiar with one another. A dinner outing, sporting event, or any other type of fun get-together that builds team spirit can help make the trip more meaningful.

Offsite meetings open the door for dispersed employees to strengthen relationships and illuminate how their work benefits others. In turn, that can make employees feel as though their work matters, instilling a sense of purpose that serves as a powerful motivator to produce better work outcomes.

83% of respondents in a Business Travel News survey said their companies had returned to hosting in-person meetings at external venues.¹⁶

While offsite gatherings can help rebuild social capital, they don't replace weekly virtual meetings. Instead, they complement them by helping to manage interactions more intentionally. According to Pozen, remote weekly meetings are essential. Team leaders can use the time effectively by sharing information like organizational news and allowing team members to provide updates on upcoming projects. But when it comes to team building, corporate culture, and victories, those types of things are valid reasons to host offsite events. Better connected employees are more likely to put in extra work efforts and increase output at a quicker pace.¹⁷

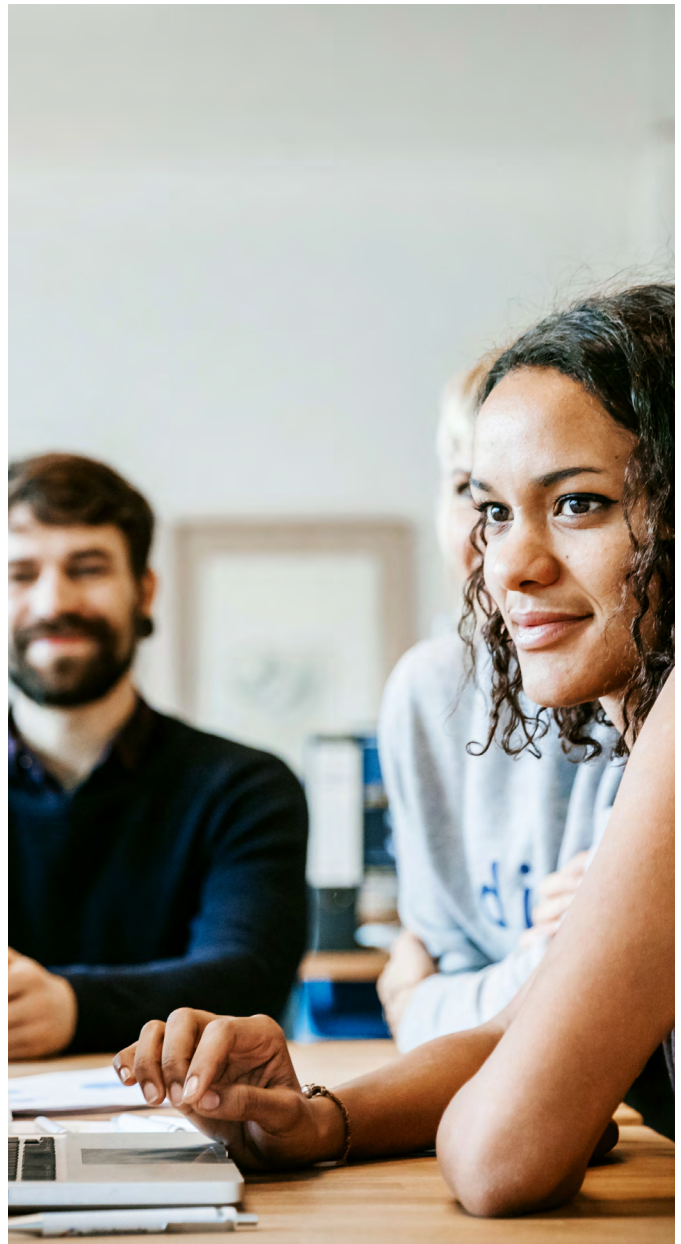
Pozen is a firm believer that in a hybrid work model, success metrics are defined in terms of accomplishments. From his standpoint, senior leaders should prioritize the output of work rather than the input of hours. Managers need to define success metrics for their teams and let team members figure out how to deliver on them. Meetings that support a results-oriented culture with a shoutout applauding an individual or team achievement can incentivize employees to achieve optimal outcomes through their work.



Learnings for travel, meetings and events leaders

Communicate the value of internal meetings. That's the key recommendation from meeting leaders at American Express Global Business Travel (Amex GBT).

With attendee costs going up and meeting budgets getting tighter, you may be getting pressure from senior leaders at your company to lessen the frequency of in-person team meetings. [Save our summary pdf](#) with the top ten reasons to advocate for more in-person meetings.



It all comes down to the right management partner

As you look inside your business for the best ways to optimize these meetings, take a closer look at ours.

At Amex GBT, we help you manage each aspect of travel and meetings whether it's a simple, small meeting or a companywide event at an offsite location. Venue sourcing, logistical planning, technology selection, reporting analytics, whatever your needs, we'll match them with solutions. While we've covered team meetings and companywide events in this e-book, we can help you plan and manage meetings for any purpose that involves bringing people together.

Our services run the gamut from supporting a single meeting to developing an entire meetings strategy that involves in-person, hybrid, and virtual events. And given the pressing need for greener meetings, we'll help develop a roadmap that addresses sustainability end-to-end – everything from education and planning to tracking and reporting. Here's a brief overview of why companies in all types of industries have been choosing us over other management partners for well over 40 years:

Expansive global coverage: Our travel and meeting professionals are located in over 140 countries so that you can fulfill local needs.

Industry connections: Through our long-term relationships with industry providers, you'll come away with favorable rates, terms, and amenities that you may not be able to get on your own.

Negotiating strength: MeetingsNet recognized us as one of the top 25 most influential partners for designing and executing meetings, conventions, and corporate events.¹⁹ That makes us better positioned to negotiate on your behalf.

Robust compliance standards: Our privacy program is built on European Union principles that stem from the most stringent and comprehensive privacy law framework in the world.

Sustainable and inclusive practices: Whether it's addressing the personal needs of your diverse attendees, sourcing minority-owned suppliers, or helping you make eco-minded decisions, you'll have the resources to drive sustainable, inclusive growth.

90% of organizations surveyed by the Global Business Travel Association said they required professional guidance in their sustainability journey.¹⁸

Strong duty of care: With travel and meetings managed through us, you'll have greater oversight of your attendees and effective methods to minimize risk.

Considering all the ways we help optimize meetings and events, it's no wonder why over 19,000 companies have trusted us to support them.

[Contact us.](#)



About Us

Amex GBT is the world's leading B2B travel platform, providing software and services to manage travel, expenses, and meetings & events for companies of all sizes. We have built the most valuable marketplace in B2B travel to deliver unrivaled choice, value, and experiences. With professionals in more than 140 countries, our clients, travelers, and meeting attendees enjoy the powerful backing of Amex GBT.

Professor Robert C. Pozen

Speaker and thought leader, Robert Pozen is also a New York Times best-selling author of multiple books on productivity and senior lecturer at MIT Sloan School of Management. He's led two global asset management companies, taught at Harvard Business School, and is a regular contributor to the Wall Street Journal as well as other leading business publications. For more on Professor Pozen, [click here](#).



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