

# ASSOCIATION — VIRTUAL EVENTS

April 2012



## State of the Sector

written by Jeff Cobb and Celisa Steele



published by Tagoras  
[www.tagoras.com](http://www.tagoras.com)  
[info@tagoras.com](mailto:info@tagoras.com)  
800.867.2046

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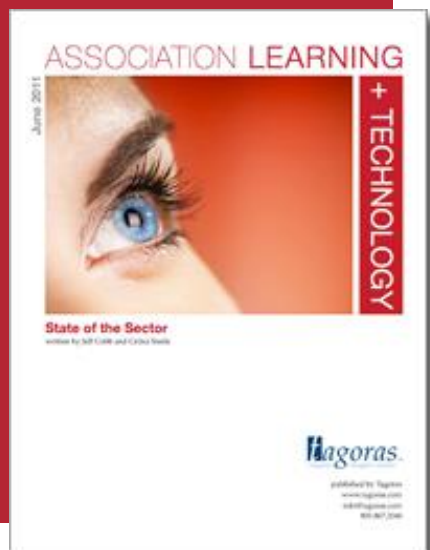
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## Additional Tagoras Reports

### Learning and Technology, LMSes, and Learning 2.0

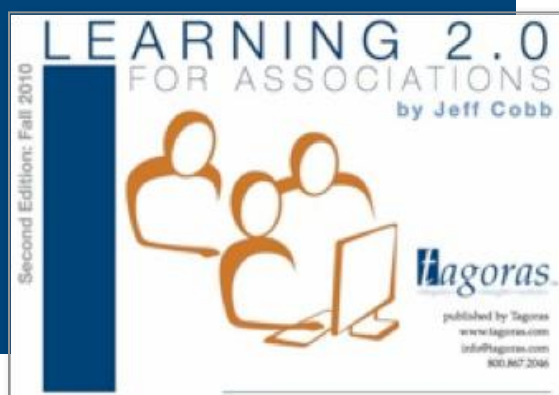
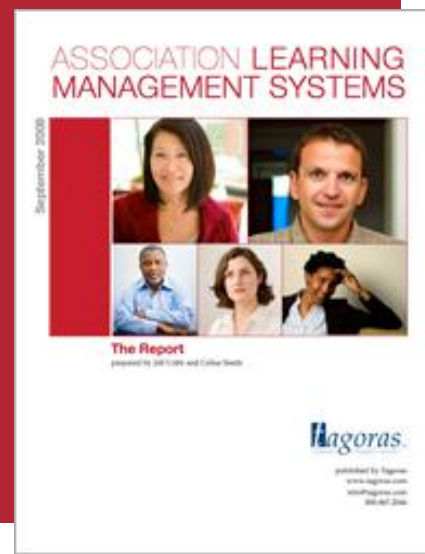


Based on survey data collected from 375 organizations as well as on interviews with 27 associations and 10 technology and service providers, *Association Learning + Technology: State of the Sector* is a 121-page, comprehensive report on technology-enabled learning in the association sector. Associations serious about launching an e-learning initiative or growing a current online education program won't want to be without it.

Learn more at <http://www.tagoras.com/catalog/association-learning-technology>.

*Association Learning Management Systems* is just what you need if you would like to dramatically reduce the time and costs associated with choosing the right learning management system. We've narrowed the field of LMS providers down to a small group dedicated to serving associations and experienced in meeting association needs. We asked the providers to respond to an extensive questionnaire and provide a demonstration of their system.

Learn more at <http://www.tagoras.com/catalog/association-lms>.



The free *Learning 2.0 for Associations* offers a basic overview of how the rise of the social Web has impacted the way that learning happens and how organizations can begin incorporating social media approaches into their traditional online and offline learning activities.

Learn more at <http://www.tagoras.com/learning20>.

# Association Virtual Events

## The Report

*Association Virtual Events 2012: State of the Sector* represents an ongoing effort to assess the growing role of virtual conferences, trade shows, and other events in the association market and to provide insight into how these events may evolve in the coming years. This report represents a wholesale update of *Association Virtual Conferences 2011: State of the Sector*, published by Tagoras in January 2011.

We renamed the report to better reflect the scope of our research, which covers virtual conferences, trade shows, and business meetings, as well as other multifaceted online events. Additionally, we found, since issuing the previous version of the report, *virtual event*, rather than *virtual conference*, to be the preferred umbrella term for these events.

At the core of this report is a survey of 107 associations conducted in November and December 2011. Respondents included those who have offered digital events and those who have not, and those who have provided valuable data about how they are using digital events, what technologies they employ to deliver them, and the business decisions that inform them.

Neither the size nor the sampling method for the data collected in the survey was sufficient for the results be considered statistically valid. Our goal with the survey was not to draw broad conclusions about virtual events in the sector—we are still too early in the adoption cycle for that—but rather to gather what information we could about the small subset of associations that have offered or plan to offer virtual events. Taken in this light, we feel the data offered here provides significant insights for organizations interested in or planning virtual events.

To supplement the survey data, we have crafted brief case studies to highlight the efforts of some associations. We intentionally selected a diverse range of organizations and virtual events.

In addition, the two authors of this report, Jeff Cobb and Celisa Steele, have each worked in the field of Web-based learning for more than a decade and have worked specifically with associations for the better part of that time. Throughout the report we provide our own analysis of the information collected through the survey and draw on our experience to offer perspectives that may not be readily apparent from the data. Our approach to doing this is relatively conservative, based on our sense that we are still in the early stages of virtual events in the association sector and that broad conclusions must be put forward cautiously.



Partial data from the online survey is included throughout this report. See the appendix for the full survey results.



# vir·tu·al e·vent

*noun* \ 'vər-chə-wəl i-'vent \

A virtual event is a Web-based event that replicates many aspects of a traditional place-based conference, membership meeting, or trade show. It may take place on a standalone basis or in conjunction with a place-based conference (i.e., as a “hybrid” event).

Virtual events feature *multiple* sessions (*not* just a single Webinar or Webcast) and may include keynote presentations, training and education workshops, discussion areas, social networking opportunities, exhibit areas for vendors, and various other features. Activities in a virtual event may take place in real time (synchronously), on demand (asynchronously), or some combination of the two.

We asked respondents to the online survey to report on their plans using this definition of a virtual event.

## Core Components of Virtual Events

Before diving into our top take-aways, let's look at the elements of virtual events. While the range of options for creating and delivering a virtual event can seem bewildering, there is a fairly standard set of technologies that have emerged as core components of most events. These include the following:

- Webinar and/or Webcasts tools** to deliver audio and video content presented by experts, sponsors, and exhibitors  
 While it is common for virtual events to include multiple real-time presentations, most organizations also archive these presentations for on-demand access. Additionally, it is common for organizations to develop the virtual event experience based entirely on pre-recorded presentations. These may be enhanced by the use of various communication tools to enable attendees to ask questions and interact with experts in real time.
- Communication tools** to allow for interaction among attendees, subject matter experts, and exhibitors  
 These tools may range from text chat features included in most Webinar platforms to integrated discussion board capabilities in the virtual platform to social media tools such as Twitter or blogging software. Use of social media tools is particularly prevalent in hybrid events as they allow for a free flow of communication among online participants and attendees at the face-to-face portion of the event.
- Document- and resource-sharing** to provide attendees with information that complements and supports presentations from subject matter experts  
 These documents and resources may include articles, case studies, checklists, and copies of presenters' slides—in short, the same types of materials an attendee at a place-based event would typically receive. For events with sponsors and exhibitors, the materials may also include white papers, brochures, and other marketing materials.



Many virtual event platforms use graphics from a place-based event to create the feel of a 3D environment.



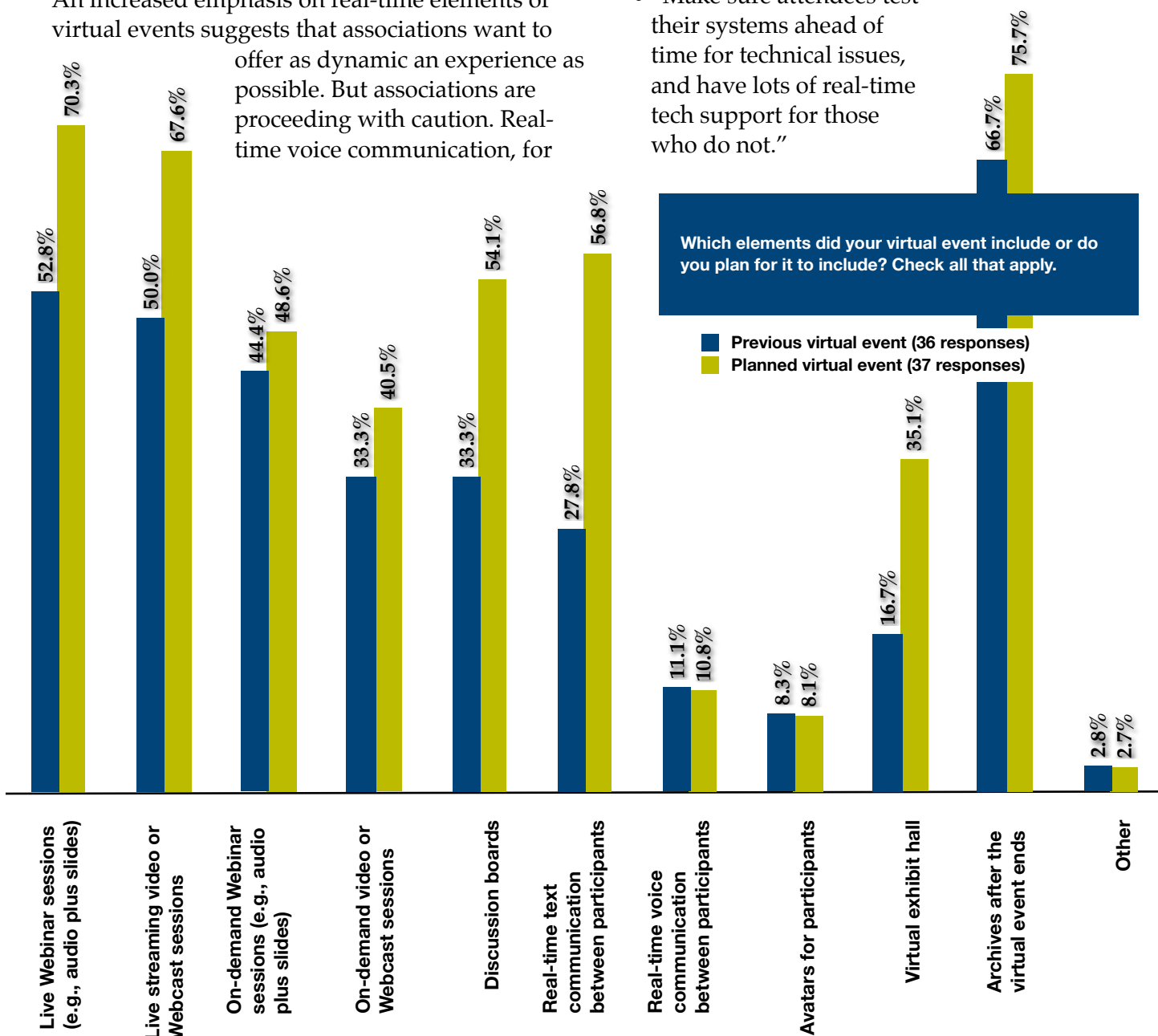
## WHAT ASSOCIATIONS ARE OFFERING

Webinars and Webcasts play a central role in virtual events. A majority of organizations that have held a virtual event included live Webinars (e.g., audio plus slides) and live streaming video or Webcast sessions. The central role of Webinars and Webcasts in virtual events is unlikely to decline over time, but organizations planning future virtual events appear to place more emphasis on live, real-time—as opposed to on-demand—use of these technologies. Real-time text chat between participants, a feature offered by under a third of organizations that have held a virtual event, also receives more emphasis among organizations planning events in the future.

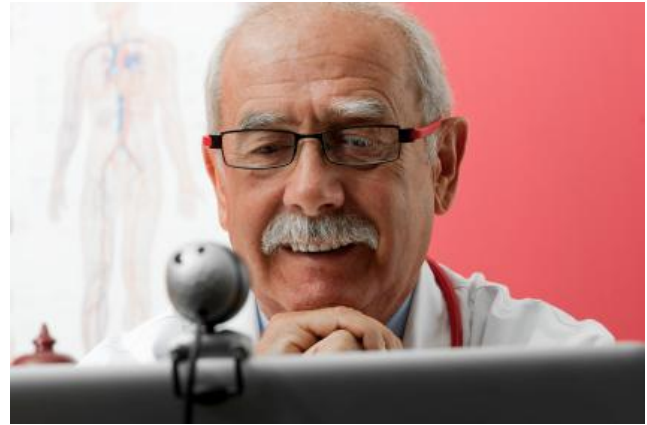
An increased emphasis on real-time elements of virtual events suggests that associations want to offer as dynamic an experience as possible. But associations are proceeding with caution. Real-time voice communication, for

example, has not been as widely embraced as text communication, and use of this feature appears unlikely to rise in the immediate future. A key barrier to adoption may be the perception many organizations have of end user technical capabilities. Several survey respondents commented on technical issues when asked about the lessons they'd learned from offering a virtual event.

- “Be sure to communicate all access requirements (Web / audio) to attendees, and encourage them to test their systems before joining.”
- “Be sure to not be too far ahead of what your audience wants as far as delivery modality.”
- “Make sure attendees test their systems ahead of time for technical issues, and have lots of real-time tech support for those who do not.”



Additionally, the use of avatars, or simulated versions of event participants, has so far not been a common element of association virtual events. Only 8.3 percent of organizations that have already held a virtual event made use of this feature, and the percentage is essentially the same (8.1 percent) among organizations planning events. Again, perceptions of user capabilities are likely a barrier to adoption.



Our expectation for use of avatars and voice communication is that the sector will hit a tipping point in the coming two to five years, driven by wider-spread use of voice over IP for general communication and a rapidly growing, diverse audience for sophisticated video and online games.

Survey responses show organizations hope to make greater use of virtual exhibitor capabilities in the future. Over a third of the organizations planning a virtual event expect to include a virtual exhibit hall, compared to only 16.7 percent of organizations that have already held virtual events. Success with virtual exhibits is currently somewhat mixed, but clearly some form of them will persist—and it will be interesting to see how this aspect of virtual events develops over time.

Finally, the survey shows archives are the single most popular element of planned and previously held virtual events. We foresee a future where virtual events evolve into perpetual online environments, not constrained by time. Learners can return again and again to access knowledge and engage in ongoing activities. If a virtual event can be described as a book focused on a particular topic, then the future is a 24/7 library where learners find limitless shelves overflowing with books.

### **HOW ASSOCIATIONS ARE OFFERING VIRTUAL EVENTS**

We asked survey respondents which technologies and service providers they used to deliver their virtual events, and, of 19 choices, only three garnered double digits: Adobe Connect (14.7 percent), GoToMeeting (26.5 percent), and the catch-all “Other” option (32.4 percent).

The field is clearly fragmented, and, in this hodgepodge of pure software companies and value-add service organizations, there’s no clear winner.

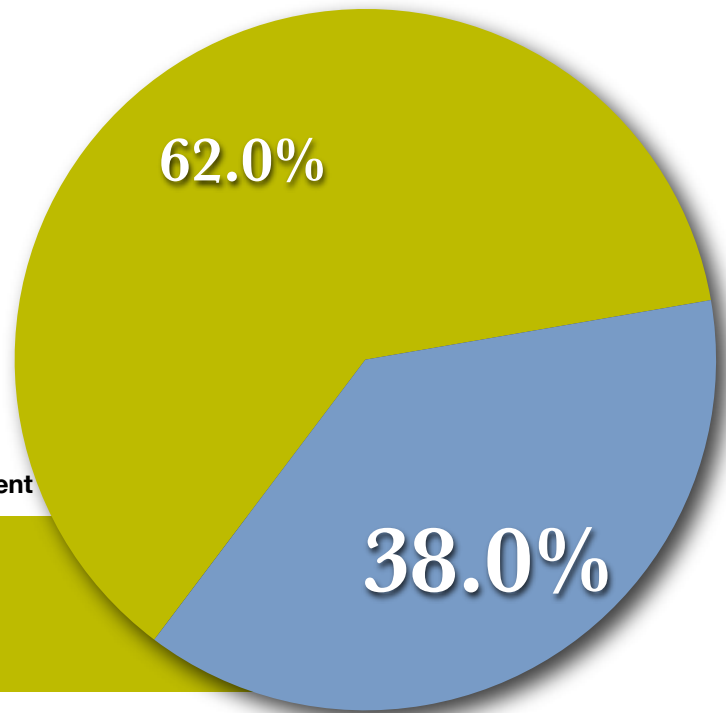
## Top Take-Aways

Because most association professionals are pressed for time, we've intentionally kept the core of this report brief. We've pored over the data from the survey respondents and culled our top take-aways.

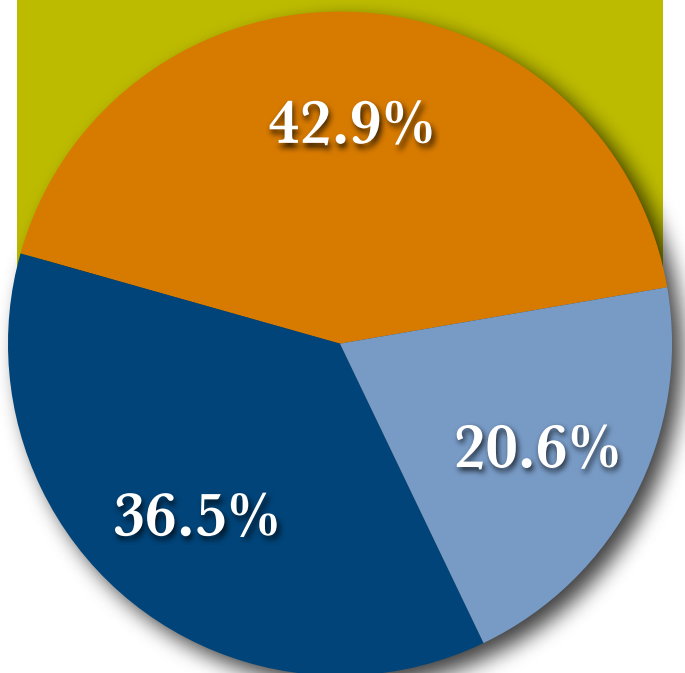
Partial data from the online survey is cited in the sections that follow, but if you have the interest and the time, see the raw survey results included in an appendix.

● Offered a virtual event ● No previous virtual event

Has your organization previously offered a virtual event?  
(100 responses)



Do you plan to offer a virtual event in the future? (63 responses)  
Of the 62 percent of overall respondents who had not yet held a virtual event, just over 57 percent have plans to offer one in the future.



● Planning to offer a virtual event in next 12 months  
● Planning to offer one more than 12 months out  
● No plans to offer one

### ADOPTION TRIPLES IN A YEAR

Of 112 respondents to the online survey that served as the basis for our *Association Virtual Conferences 2011*, 11.7 percent indicated their organizations had offered a virtual event, and 23.7 percent indicated their organization planned to offer one within the coming 12 months—which led us to report in January 2011 that the use of virtual events might triple in the coming year. And that's almost exactly what happened. In the latest survey, 38.0 percent of respondents said their organization has previously offered a virtual event.

Among the 62.0 percent of organizations that have not previously offered a virtual event, 57.1 percent have plans to offer one in the future.

This growth is driven by a variety of factors: the emergence of lower-cost, easier-to-use platforms; the rapid, widespread adoption of social and gaming technologies; time and cost pressures created by the downturn in the global economy; and the increasingly common expectation, particularly among younger generations, that meaningful collaboration and learning can be done online.

While it would be hard to make the case that virtual events are *de rigueur* when well over half the survey respondents are yet to offer one, the swift uptick in adoption promises they're here to stay.

## GOING DIGITAL EXPANDS REACH

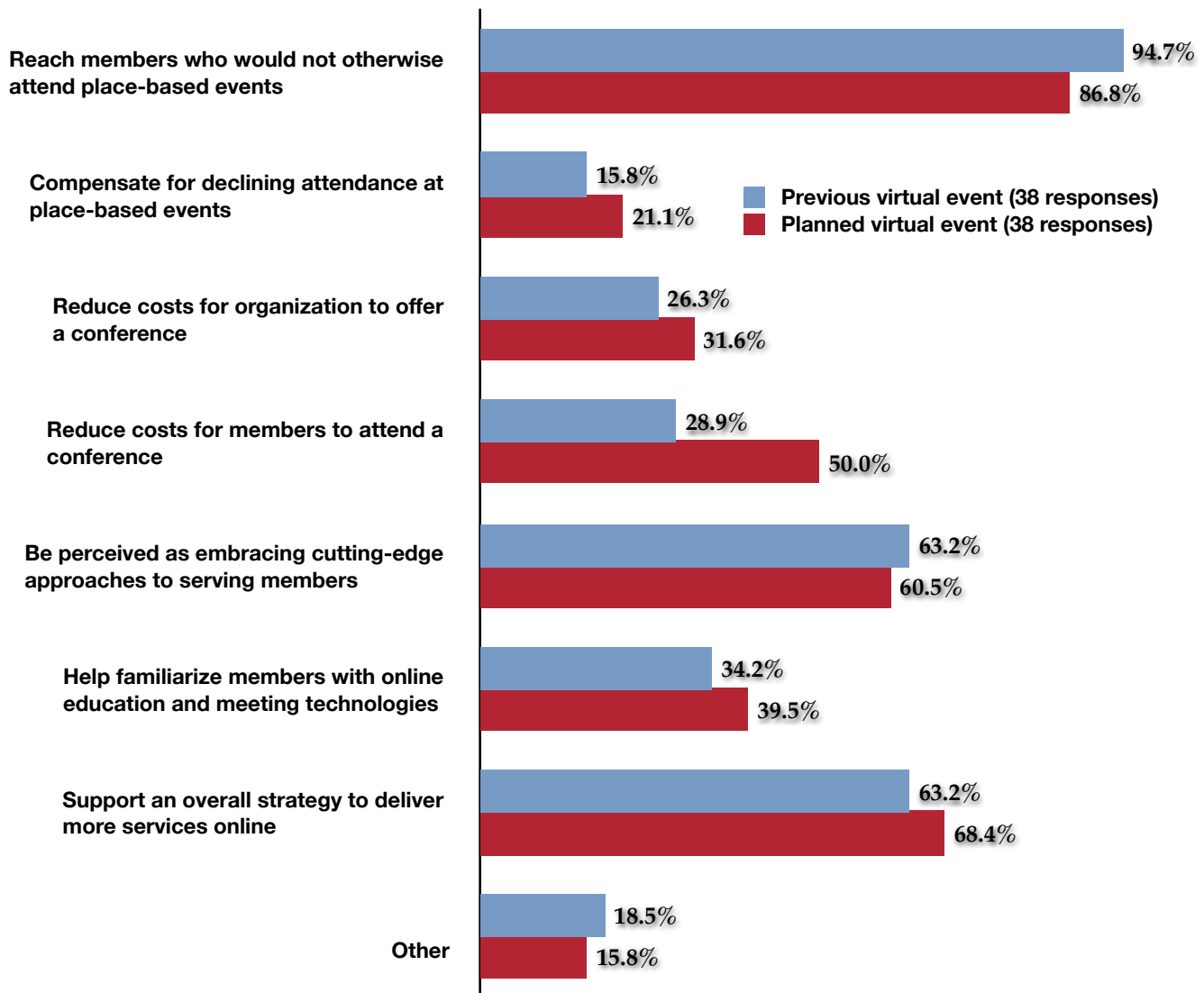
“To reach members who could not otherwise attend” was reported as the primary reason organizations have held or plan to hold a virtual event. The secondary and tertiary reasons why organizations were “to be perceived as embracing cutting-edge approaches to serving members” and “to support an overall strategy to deliver more services online”; organizations that have held a virtual event give equal weight to the two while organizations that have not yet held a virtual event but plan to offer one gave more weight to the overall strategy of delivering more services online.

These motivations clearly reflect necessity—organizations see a need to provide more options as travel budgets are trimmed and time becomes an increasingly precious commodity for members—but they also reflect a commitment to leadership and purpose. Many association professionals are embracing virtual events even before their members ask for them, and they’re doing so as part of an overall strategy built on online service.

Compensating for declining attendance at place-based events ranked relatively low as a reason for offering a virtual event. Among those planning for a virtual event, 21.1 percent indicated declining

### Why did your organization decide to or why has it decided to offer a virtual event? Check all that apply.

Reaching members who would not otherwise attend place-based events was the top motivation for both organizations that have previously offered a virtual event and those that plan to offer one.



attendance as a reason; only 15.8 percent of the organizations that have already offered a virtual event gave this as a reason.

In our experience, organizations that embrace virtual events are less concerned with attrition at their current events and more concerned with reaching the significant portion of membership that does not—and may never—attend place-based events with any regularity.

### SOME ASSOCIATIONS STEER CLEAR

When asked why their organizations don't plan to offer a virtual event, survey respondents gave roughly equal weight to four reasons: concerns about the quality of the learning experience (51.9 percent), a belief that members don't want virtual events (48.1 percent), concerns about cannibalization of place-based events (48.1 percent), and concerns about technology (44.4 percent).

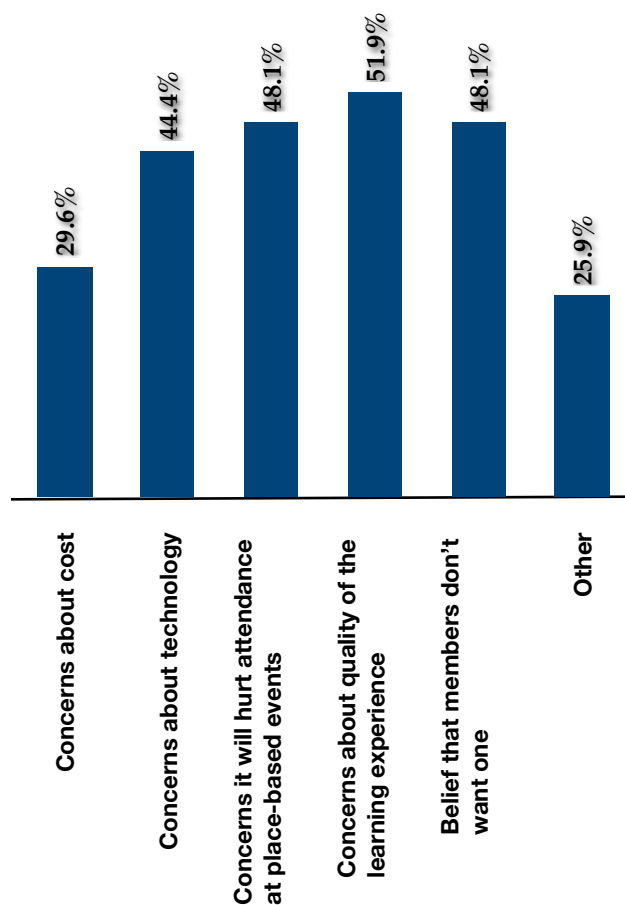
We don't dispute that the quality of the learning experience is paramount—and we're glad so many respondents are clearly thinking about quality—but research has shown a fear of the effectiveness of online learning is misplaced. Whether content is delivered via a virtual event doesn't matter; what matters are the instructional methods. As instructional design experts Ruth Colvin Clark and Richard E. Mayer put it:

*From all the media comparison research, we have learned that it's not the delivery medium, but rather the instructional methods that cause learning. When the instructional methods remain essentially the same, so does the learning, no matter how the instruction is delivered. When a course uses effective instructional methods, learning will be better, no matter what delivery medium is used.\**

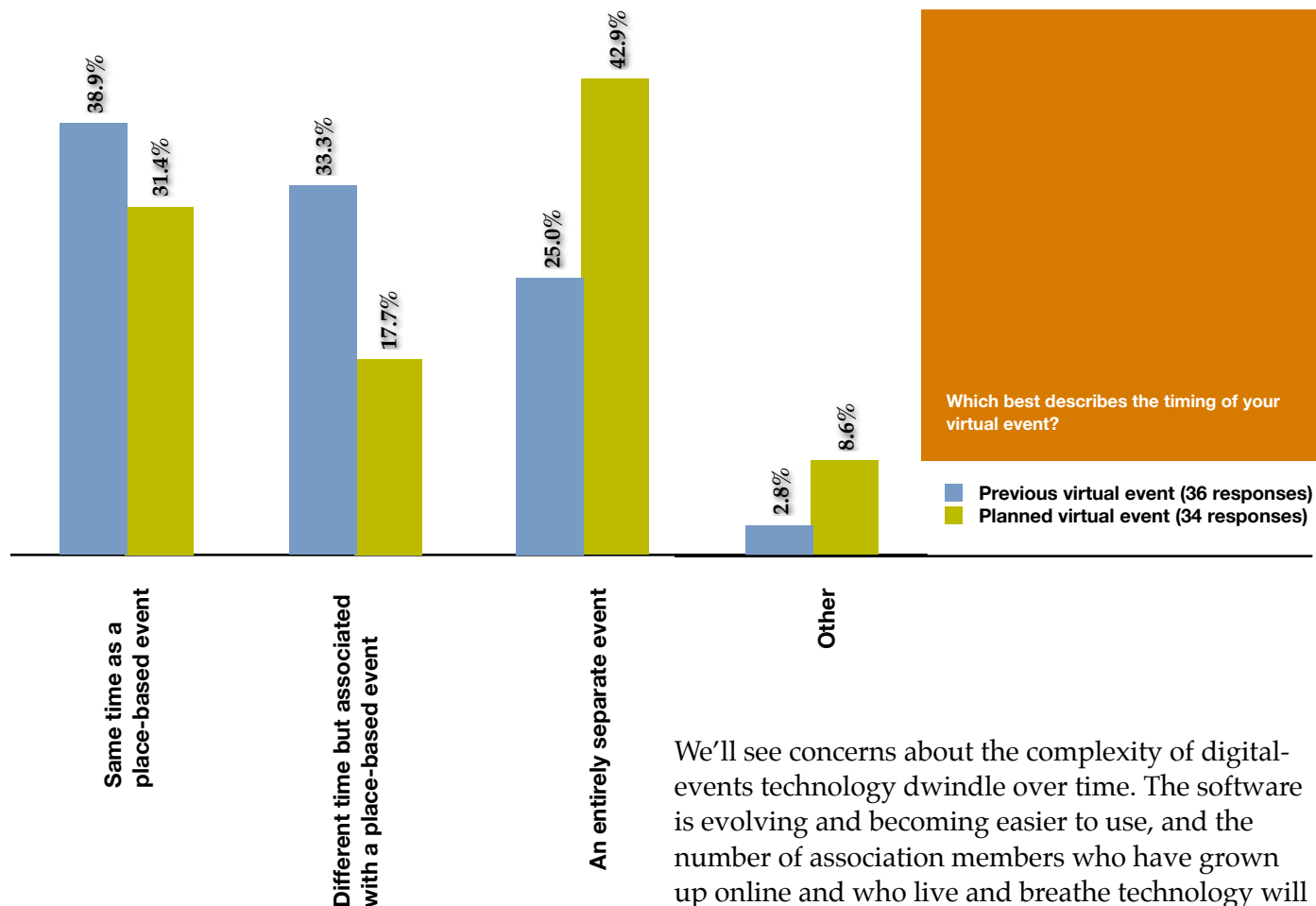
The organizations surveyed that have held or plan to hold virtual events strongly believe these events offer a way to deliver more fully on the organizational mission by reaching members who might otherwise be under-served. Organizations with no plans to offer a virtual event, on the other

\* From *e-Learning and the Science of Instruction* (San Francisco: Pfeiffer, 2008), 21.

What are the major reasons your organization will not be offering a virtual event? Check all that apply. (27 responses)







hand, are not convinced that members would value the experience. While we don't believe they are right for everyone or every organization, we would challenge organizations that believe their members don't want a virtual event to question their assumptions. If you find your organization in this camp, do you have evidence that your members don't want a virtual event? Even if you do, consider your organization's role in leading its field—not just dishing up the tried and true (but tired) options that don't differentiate your organizations from other options your members have.

As for the concern about a virtual event hurting attendance at place-based events, the stories we've heard from both vendors and associations working with digital events suggest the objection is unwarranted. Our expectation is that this fear will fade substantially as more associations gain experience with virtual events and as hard data is collected to make the case against cannibalization. But it will take time to gather that data.

We'll see concerns about the complexity of digital-events technology dwindle over time. The software is evolving and becoming easier to use, and the number of association members who have grown up online and who live and breathe technology will only increase.

Concerns about cost are a holdup for less than a third of the organizations who aren't planning a digital event. The digital-events technology and the market itself are maturing and growing; prices are coming down some, which accounts in part for the reduced concern. The other reason cost may not be a major concern is that organizations increasingly realize digital events are not primarily about saving money but about offering value.

### THE FUTURE MAY BE STAND-ALONE EVENTS

Once an organization decides to offer a virtual event, a key next question is how it should be scheduled in relation to existing place-based events. Options range from offering virtual activities that extend and enhance an existing conference or workshop to creating an entirely new, distinct event scheduled at a different time.

A little under three-quarters of organizations that have already offered a virtual event tied it to a

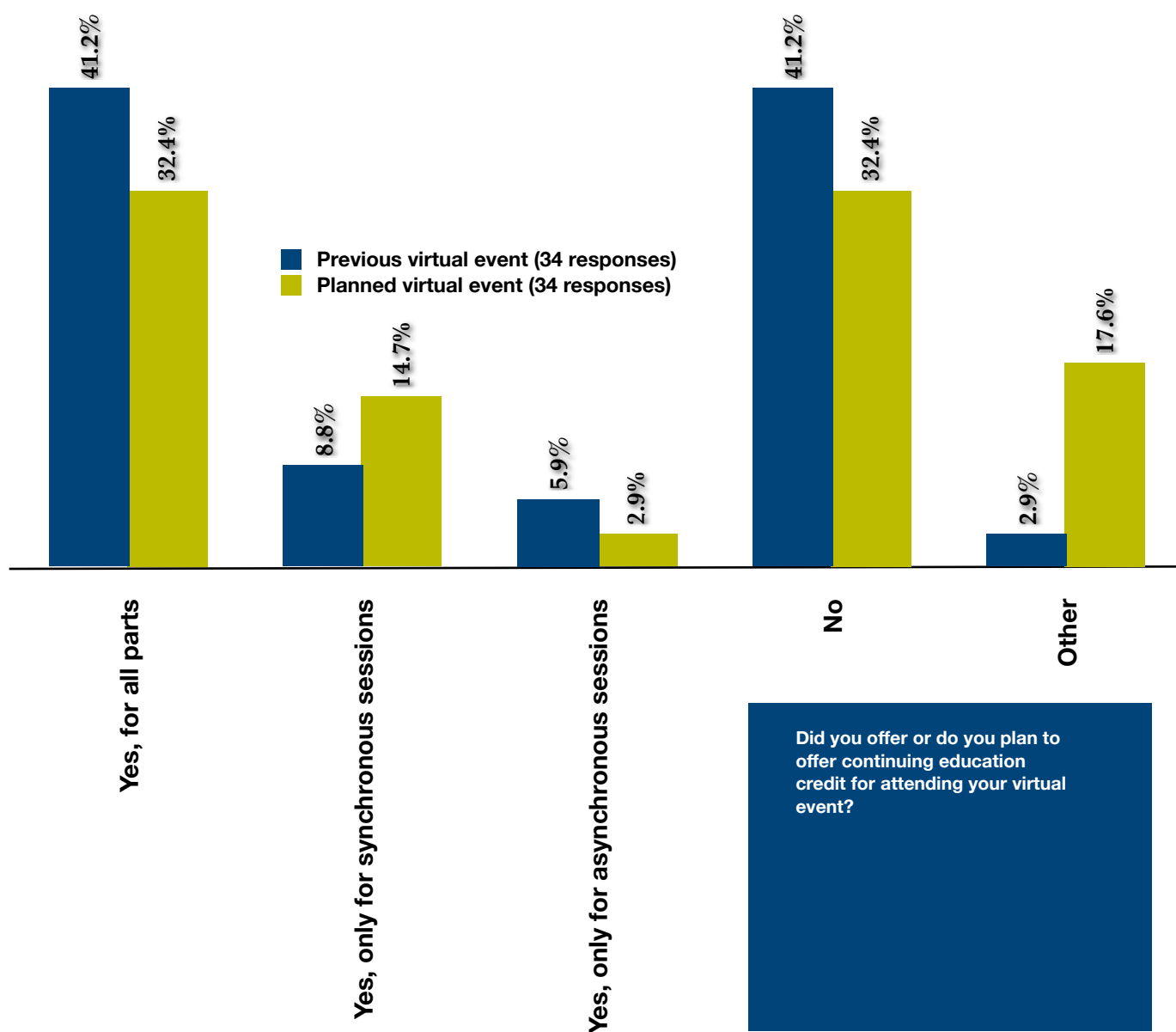
place-based event (regardless of whether the events were held at the same time), leaving only a quarter to offer the digital event as a stand-alone. In marked contrast, 42.9 percent of organizations planning a digital event in the future intend to hold it totally separate from a place-based event.

These numbers suggest digital events now may need a connection with place-based events for legitimacy or appeal. But over time, as attendees become more familiar with the offering, organizations may find it easier to sign folks up for a completely virtual event and thereby avoid the expense of a hybrid—organizations putting on hybrid events add the technology costs of a digital event to the already substantial costs of a traditional bricks-and-mortar conference.

## SIZABLE CHUNKS OFFER NO CE

Another key strategic question for organizations planning to offer a virtual event is whether to provide continuing education credit. In our research and consulting practice, we see the availability of continuing education credit as one of the most important drivers for enrollments—one that's equally important in the specific venue of virtual events.

Offering continuing education for all parts of a virtual event and *not* offering it at all tied as the top response both among organizations that have already held a virtual event (41.2 percent) and among those that plan to hold one (32.4 percent). Continuing education doesn't apply to all fields and professionals, which undoubtedly explains some of



the nos. For others, the decision to not offer credit may reflect requirements of an accrediting body that are more difficult to satisfy in an online environment or stem from the nature of the meeting—for example, virtual events that are primarily business meetings.

Although the sample size is small, it's worth noting that the trade associations that responded to the survey were significantly less likely to have offered credit than professional societies: 100.0 percent of trade associations (6) indicated no credit versus 23.1 percent of professional societies (26).

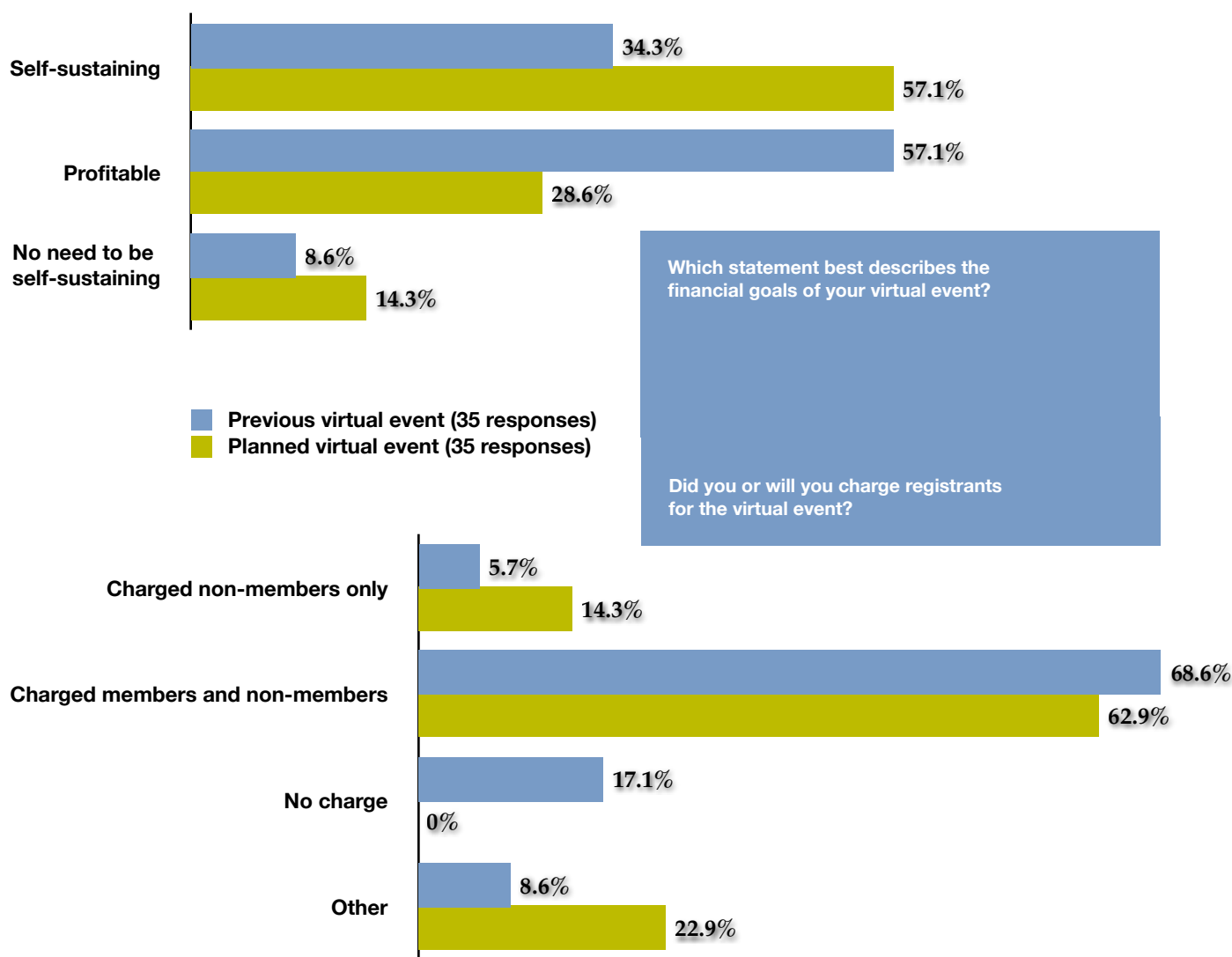
While fewer organizations planning a virtual event say they will offer credit for all components (32.4 percent compared with 41.2 percent of organizations that have already offered a virtual event), the numbers for offering credit for all or part of the event don't differ much—55.9 percent of organizations that have already held an event

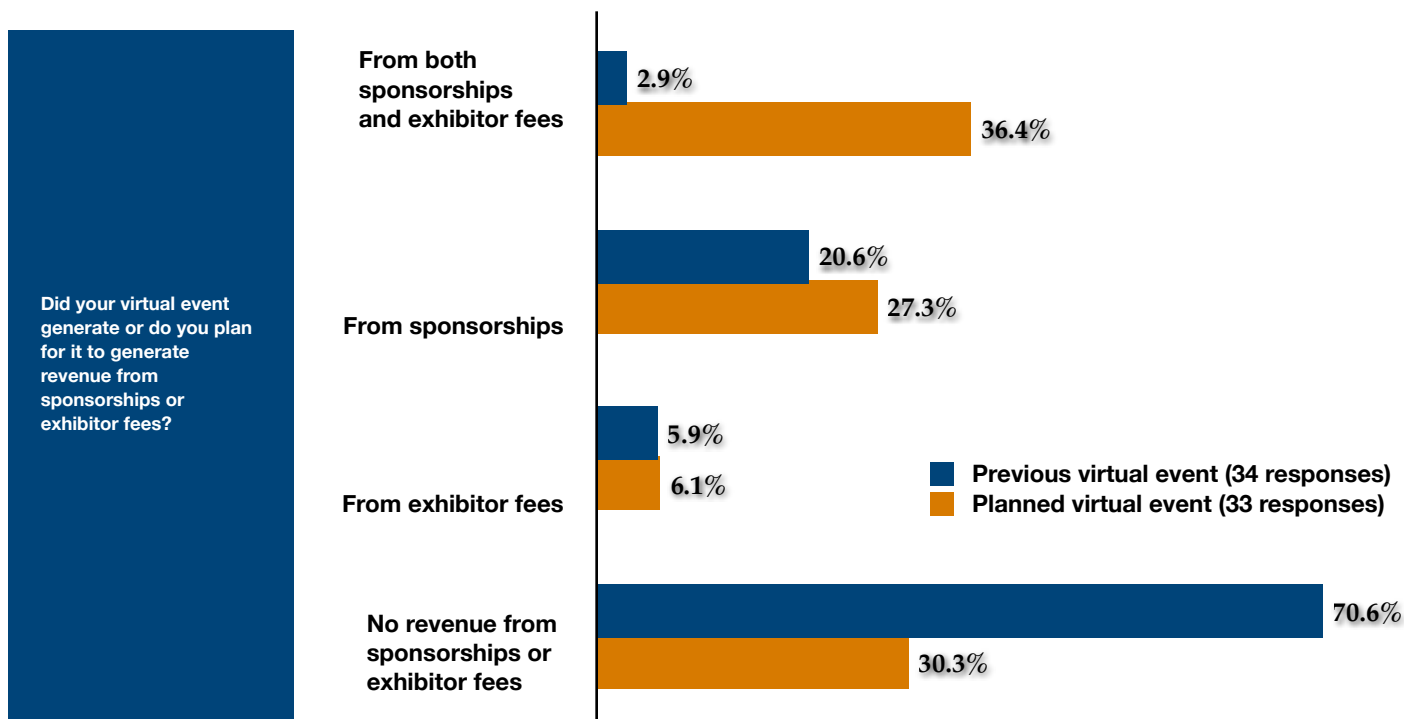
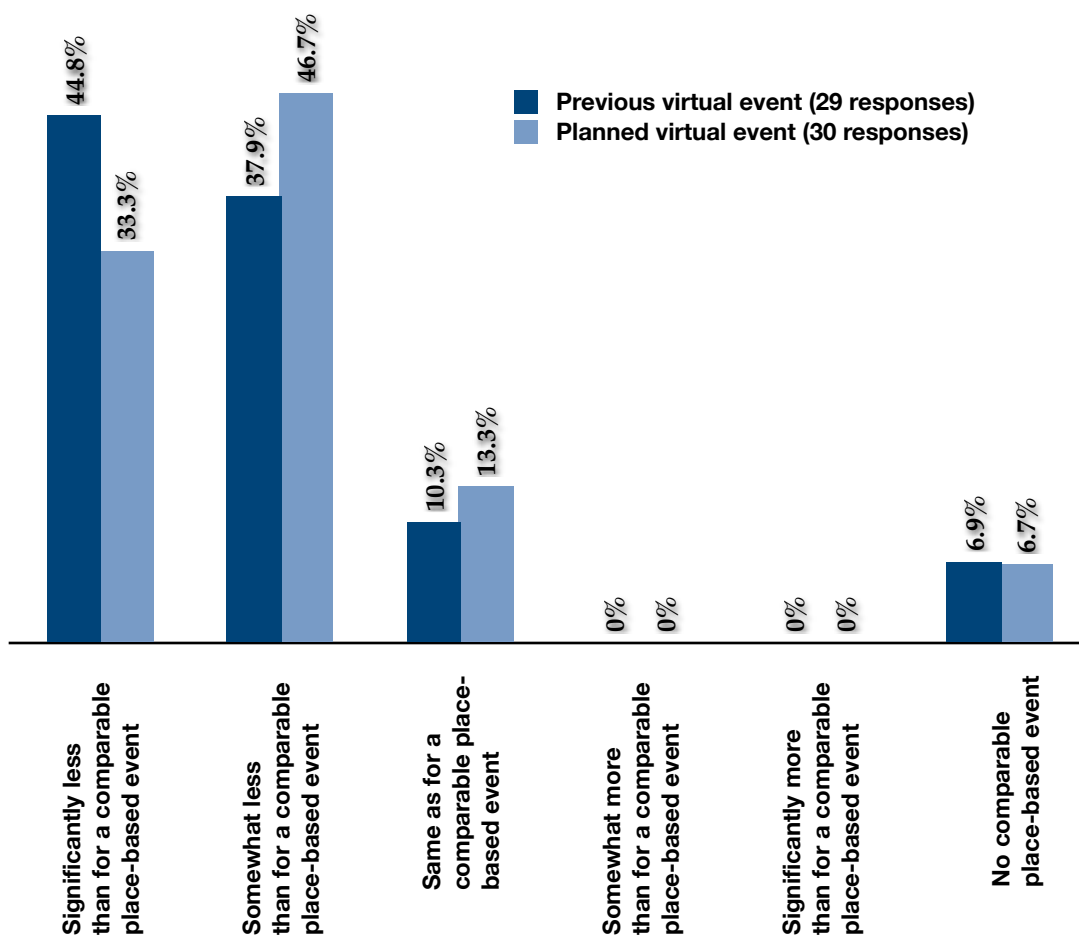
offered all or part for credit, and 50.0 percent of those planning to enter the virtual event arena will offer credit for all or part.

Given its overall importance as a demand driver for educational activities, our expectation is that the availability of continuing education credit at virtual events will increase over time. However, because events often focus on hot topics that members may need information about regardless of credit and because attendees will become more and more adept over time at getting networking value out of virtual events, those that do not offer continuing education credit will remain viable.

### REGISTRATION FEES AND SPONSORSHIPS DRIVE FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Whether a virtual event must generate revenue and, if so, how much are other key questions organizations must answer. The vast majority (91.4 percent) of survey respondents who had offered a





virtual event indicated it had to be self-sustaining financially. Among those planning virtual events, 85.7 percent said the same. The expectations for profitability were markedly higher for organizations that have offered a virtual event when compared to those planning one (57.1 versus 28.6 percent). This difference suggests that organizations planning a virtual event may view it primarily as a service they need to offer, not a cash cow. Of course, other than the 14.3 percent willing to underwrite the expense of events, these organizations still expect the event to pull its own financial weight even if it's not adding to the bottom line.

To generate revenue, most (68.6 percent) of the organizations that previously offered a virtual event charged both members and non-members. A similar percentage (62.9 percent) of those planning virtual events indicated they would charge both members and non-members.

Because the amount attendees are charged for an event can vary dramatically from association to association, we focused the survey on how fees for virtual events compare to those charged for established face-to-face events. Organizations that have already offered virtual events tended to charge significantly less for these events (44.8 percent) while organizations yet to hold their first virtual event plan to charge somewhat less (46.7 percent). Not a single organization reported charging or planning to charge more for a virtual event than for a comparable place-based event.

People tend to associate price with value; associations that price their virtual events at rock bottom may be unintentionally sending the message that the value is low too. We'd like to see organizations embrace the value of virtual events and reflect it in the pricing.

Small percentages of both organizations that have offered a virtual event and those that are planning

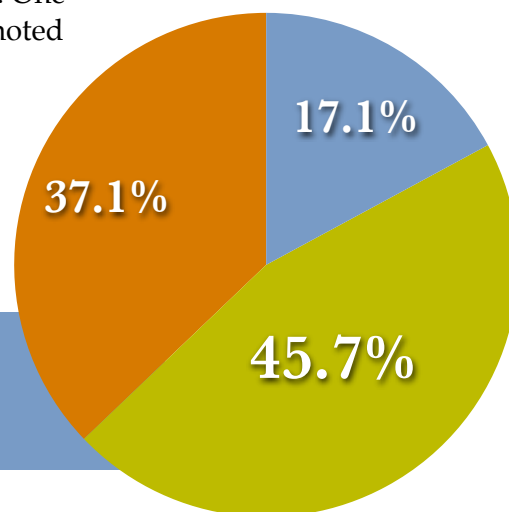
one (under 7 percent for both groups) said they held no comparable place-based event by which to measure. We think we'll see the numbers grow here as more organizations expand their digital offerings and begin to rollout events dedicated to topics or segments not previously addressed.

Registration fees paid by participants are not, of course, the only way to generate revenue from a virtual event. Sponsors and exhibitors can contribute too. Organizations planning for virtual events intend to place greater emphasis on revenue from sponsors and exhibitors. Most organizations (70.6 percent) that have previously held virtual events have not collected sponsorship or exhibitor fees. Almost 70 percent of those planning for virtual events, on the other hand, are hoping to generate revenue from sponsors, exhibitors, or both.

Given the clear emphasis on financial sustainability, if not profitability, we expect to see organizations continue to charge members and non-members for virtual events, raise pricing for their virtual events to an amount closer to place-based pricing, and grow the revenue from sponsors and exhibitors, especially as the technology platforms evolve to offer robust trade show capabilities that rival—and even surpass—the concrete exhibit hall floor for connecting vendors with prospects.

### ATTENDANCE ISN'T STELLAR

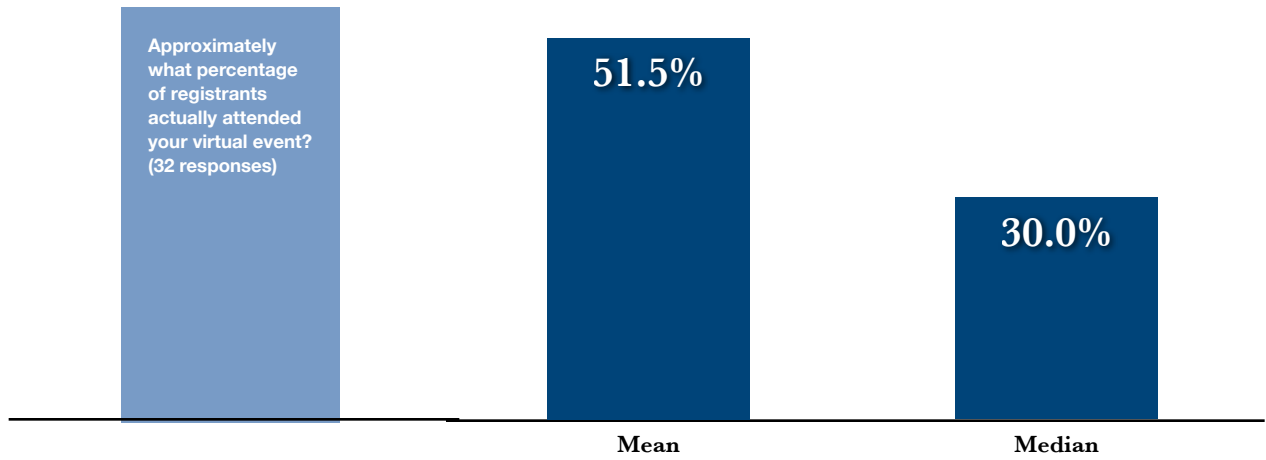
To help gauge the appeal of virtual events, we asked organizations that have held a virtual event to tell us how actual registrations compared to what they expected. More than 60 percent of respondents found that registrations either met or exceeded expectations. One respondent noted that her organization saw the registration numbers



How did registrations for your virtual event compare to your expectations? (35 responses)

● Higher than expected ● Met expectations ● Lower than expected





rise at the deadline: “Attendees often wait until the last day or two before a virtual event to register.” Organizations can control for this procrastination by requiring early registration by a firm deadline or providing early-bird incentives for timely registration. Or they can embrace the opportunity to capture late-comers without the logistical headaches that may accompany last-minute registrations for brick-and-mortar events.

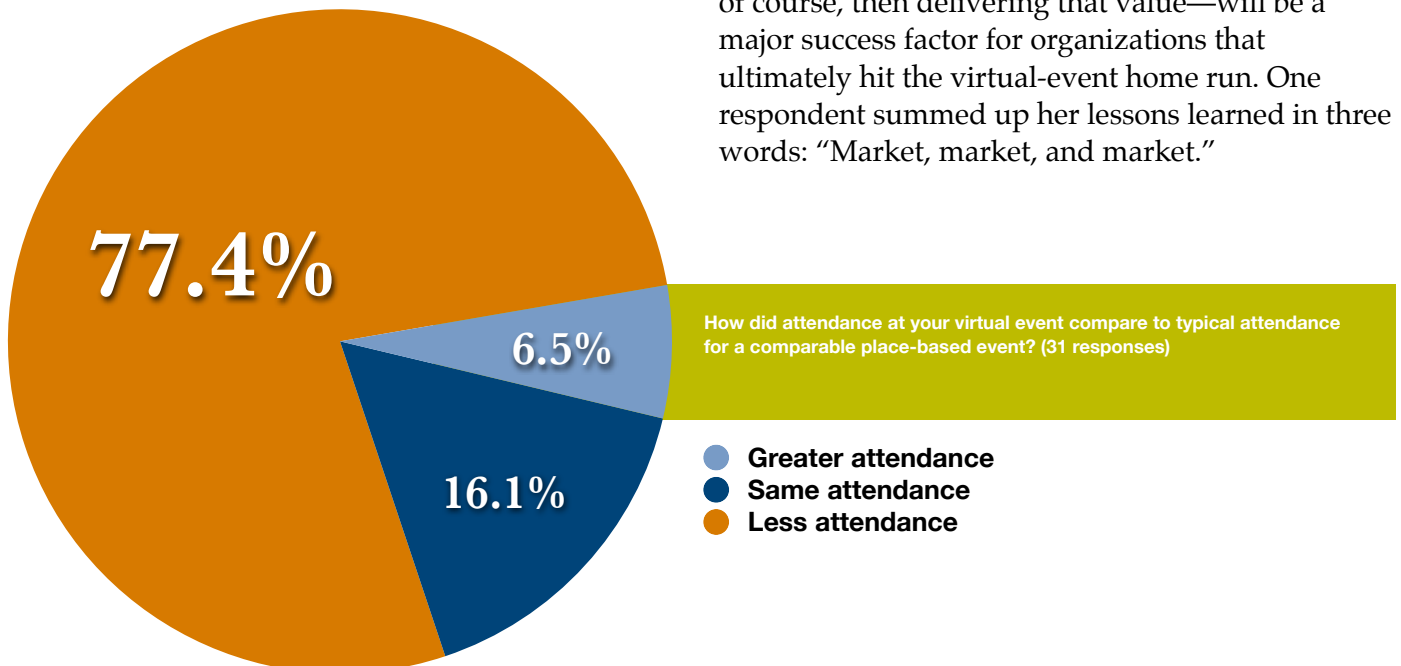
Knowing that actual attendance for online education is often well below registration levels, we asked what percentage of registrants actually attend a typical virtual event. Respondents reported an average attendance rate of 51.5 percent of registrations and a median of 30.0 percent.

Among respondents who offered a place-based event comparable to their virtual event, over three-quarters reported a lower level of attendance at the

virtual event; only 6.5 percent reported attendance was higher.

Curiosity likely brought quite a few attendees to their first virtual event. But novelty wears off. Organizations will have to focus on the content and provide learning and networking opportunities that deliver both intellectual and emotional impact. One survey respondent commented on the all-important role of content: “Price and timing do not seem to have as much of an impact on attendance as does the topic.”

With few organizations hitting it out of the park (remember that only 17.1 percent saw higher registrations than expected, and a mere 6.5 percent had higher attendance than for a similar place-based event), we see a lot of room for improvement in the areas of registration and attendance. Savvy marketing focused on the value for attendees—and, of course, then delivering that value—will be a major success factor for organizations that ultimately hit the virtual-event home run. One respondent summed up her lessons learned in three words: “Market, market, and market.”



## EVALUATIONS SHOW DECENT SUCCESS

One of the most importance success measures for any event, whether virtual or place-based, is the evaluation scores from attendees. To help gauge the success of virtual events, we asked organizations to tell us how evaluations for the virtual event compared to those for a comparable place-based events. Among respondents who offered a place-based event comparable to their virtual event, 9.7 percent indicated “attendees gave higher evaluation scores for the virtual event,” and 67.7 percent indicated “attendees gave the same or very similar evaluation scores for the virtual event.”

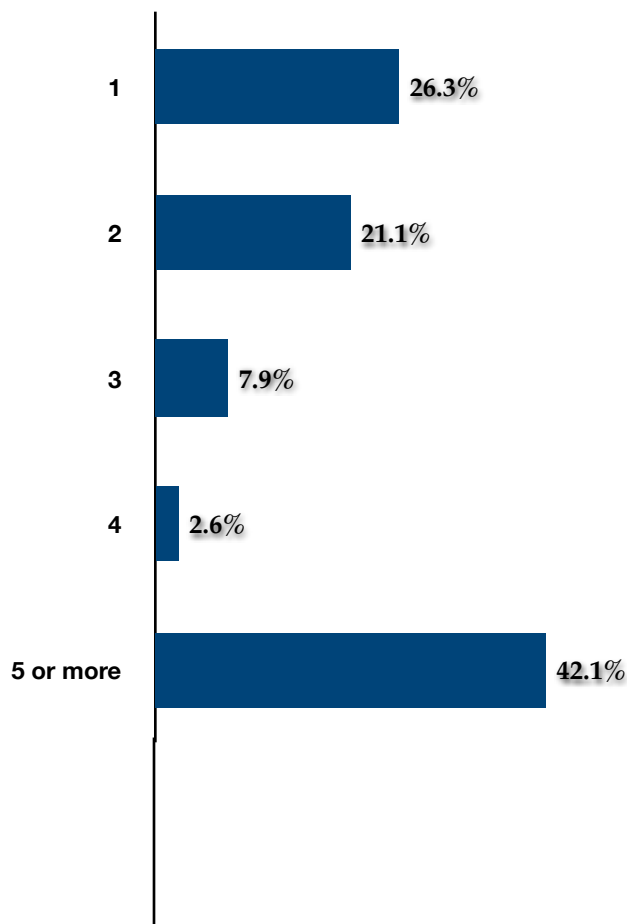
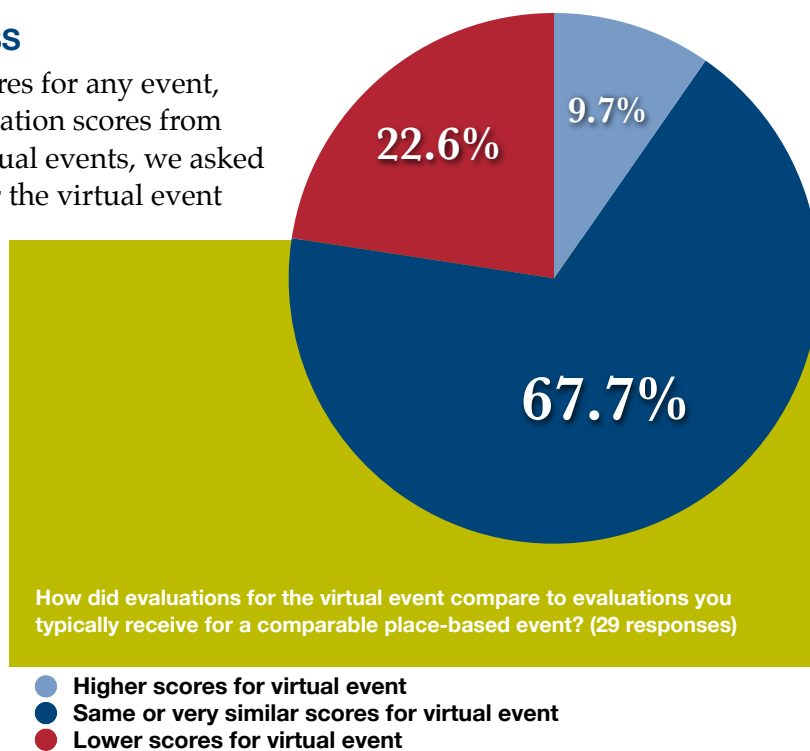
While the group of organizations that have ventured into virtual events is still relatively small, it seems clear that the goal of delivering a virtual experience attendees will value is achievable. But the 22.6 percent of organizations seeing lower evaluation scores have to find and address the root cause.

In our work, we interview, formally and informally, many association staff and association members. When talking about barriers to online education in general, we hear over and over that learners fear losing the ancillary benefits of place-based education: the impromptu conversations in hallways and over lunch and the more structured networking opportunities built into many sessions. We believe virtual events that are architected to support peer-to-peer and informal learning will garner higher evaluation scores—because they’re providing what attendees value.

## The Future of Virtual Events

A final indicator of whether virtual events will find an enduring place in the portfolio of association education offerings is whether the organizations that have held virtual events plan to do so again.

Among survey respondents indicating that their organization had previously offered a virtual event, almost three-quarters had held more than one, and a notable 42.1 percent said they had offered a virtual event five or more times.



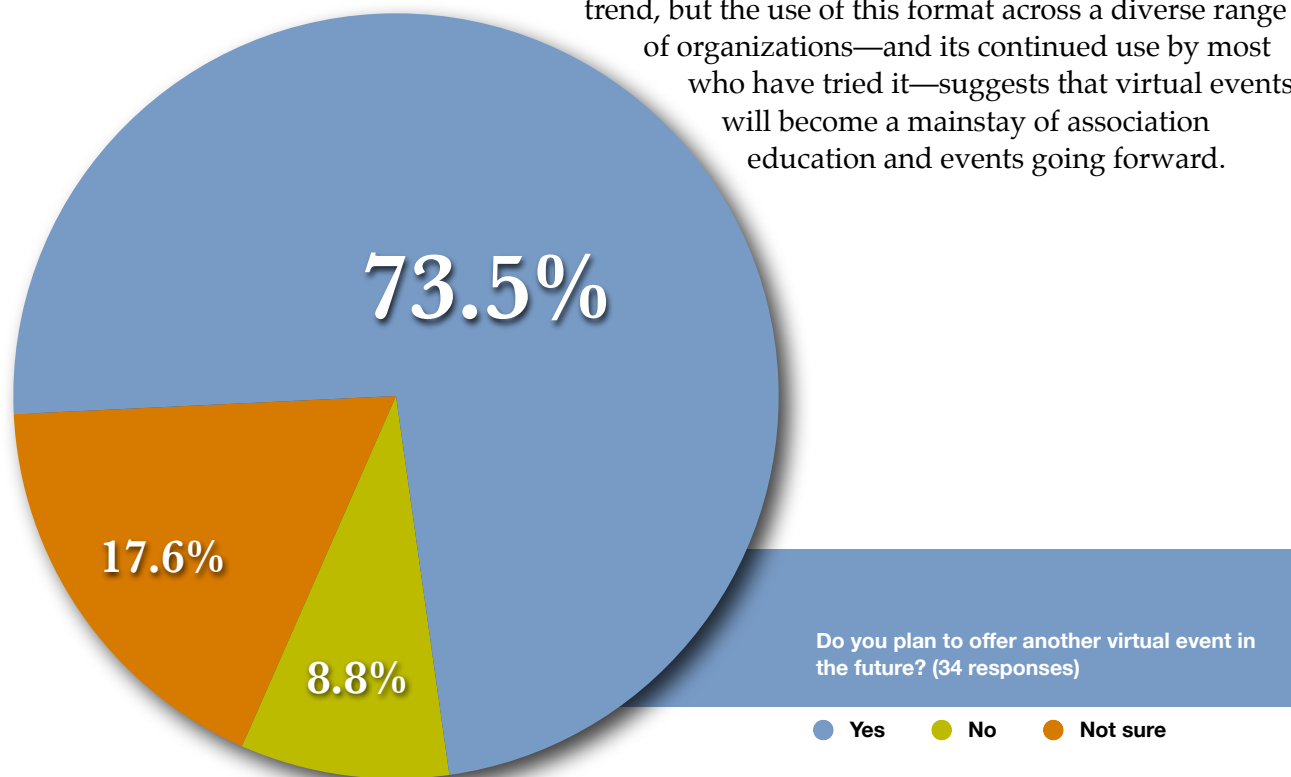
Almost three-quarters of all organizations that have held a virtual event in the past indicated they would do so again—and many already have multiple times. Under a tenth of respondents said they would not hold another event.

The better the attendance, the better the evaluations, and the higher the financial goals (i.e., an expectation of profitability) for their previous virtual event or events, the more likely the organization is to hold another. This only makes sense, as those organizations are seeing a financial boost to their bottom line along with satisfied attendees—a coveted win-win for events.

Others have learned from the foray into virtual events that it's not the right format for their organization and abandoned in favor of another. One survey respondent said, "We have not conducted a virtual conference ever since [our first]. We have found success in Webinars."

Even among those who plan to offer other virtual events, we find hesitation to extrapolate too much based on limited experience. As one individual put it, "I don't know that a year has been sufficient to learn anything, except maybe that a significant number of our constituents *do* want this type of education delivery. Which we suspected, but now have proof."

Clearly we are still in the early days of virtual events as a trend, but the use of this format across a diverse range of organizations—and its continued use by most who have tried it—suggests that virtual events will become a mainstay of association education and events going forward.



## A Virtual Conference on, and in, Practice

### STC's Next Logical Step

In November 2011, the Society for Technical Communication (STC)—a 6,400-member professional society whose members work in every industry, producing technical writing, online help, multimedia, and other forms of technical communication—took what Lloyd Tucker, deputy executive director, saw as the next logical step in its e-learning journey: trying a virtual conference.

Over the last three years, STC has focused on e-learning and now offers live Webinars three times a week and six- to eight-week online certificate courses. But Tucker wanted to try something that fell in between—an offering deeper than a one-off Webinar but less time-consuming than a certificate course. He floated the idea of a virtual conference by Saul Carliner, a member and past president of the society and an associate professor at Concordia University, who he knew to be familiar with virtual events. Carliner was enthusiastic about the viability of an STC virtual conference, and Tucker enlisted his help in the design of the event. Carliner suggested a research focus targeted at the academics (like himself) in STC's membership, and Tucker agreed.

STC's Research in Practice virtual conference, held live from 10:30 am to 4:00 pm Eastern time on a Wednesday, kicked off with a 20-minute introductory session presented by Carliner. Nine more 30-minute sessions followed, each delivered by a different presenter (and one featured co-presenters). The sessions were grouped into three topical areas, or tracks: Social Media and Technical Communication, Impact of New Technologies on the Technical Communication Processes, and Issues on Communicating Online. The conference was delivered via Adobe Connect Pro, and attendees were welcome to come and go, attending all sessions or only those of particular interest to them—the schedule specified start and end times for each session, as well as noting two breaks. Carliner led a 15-minute wrap-up session to end the conference.

Because STC had recently licensed Adobe Connect Pro, and no one on staff was up to speed on the platform yet, Tucker hired a professional producer to run the event. She held a dress rehearsal with all the presenters the day before to iron out transitions and other issues. Tucker views the producer role, whether filled by an outsider or staff, as essential.

The virtual conference was a success—Tucker got “extraordinary” feedback on the content and the ease of use (popping in and out of the conference was a snap for attendees). The president of the society participated and still raves about it.

**Tucker didn't set a goal of profitability for the virtual conference—his intent was to simply do it.**



Lloyd Tucker, deputy executive director  
at the Society for Technical Communication

Registrants for the event were mostly sites (e.g., universities) with a few individuals, and the conference attracted 27 registrants in all. While Tucker said he'd hoped for more registrants, he was pleased that almost 200 people participated in some part of the conference.

Tucker didn't set a goal of profitability for the conference—his intent was to simply do it. If it was profitable, great, but he told the board that the organization just needed to see if it worked. STC charged its regular members \$195 (for a site or for an individual registration), its student members \$125, and its "not yet members" \$495. Since STC had been charging its regular members \$79 for a live 60-minute Webinar, Tucker thought \$195 for a 5.5-hour virtual conference should look like a bargain. After accounting for direct costs (but excluding staff and general and administrative expenses), STC pocketed about \$1,000 on the event. Not bad for a first foray.

STC plans to try a hybrid event at its TechComm Summit in 2012.



As for lessons learned, Tucker says next time he'll tinker with the formula.

- Hold the virtual event over two or three days.  
Based on feedback from participants, Tucker thinks spreading the same amount of content over multiple days will be more attractive, as it leaves attendees more time to tend to other responsibilities.
- Pick a topic with a broader appeal.  
The academic segment of STC's membership is relatively small, but Tucker went with it given Carliner's knowledge of that audience and his willingness to help.
- Cater the pricing to sites, or groups.  
Tucker thinks the pricing may have been a little too expensive for individuals but believes he could charge more for site registrations. He's toying with the idea of varying the fee based on the size of the group at each site, but he still has to think through questions about how to track the numbers (honor system?) and whether the purchaser knows how many people will participate at the site (one purchaser had indicated she expected from 10 to 30 people to attendee from her site).
- Improve collection of evaluations.  
STC sent out a formal post-event evaluation via SurveyMonkey, but Tucker would like to see a higher response rate. He's wrestling with how to handle site registrants—for the first virtual conference, he asked the purchaser at each site to forward the survey link to those who participated, but he doesn't know whether they did.

Tucker will have a chance to make these changes soon—he's planning at least one and maybe two virtual conferences for 2012. The next one will focus on technical editing (one of STC's biggest and most active special interest groups) and will likely be held this summer. Tucker plans to comb through the Webinar archives and add a couple recordings to this next virtual conference—to give registrants a little more bang for their buck.

Archived content in general is at the top of Tucker's to-do list for 2012. STC has recorded all its live Webinars so far this year, as well as last fall's virtual conference; now Tucker is just waiting on his IT department to get the STC Web site set up so he can resell the recordings. For the Research in Practice virtual conference content, he's planning to break it down into the three topical tracks and offer each for sale separately.

Also on STC's horizon is a hybrid event—at its annual meeting in May, Tuckers will use a poster session as his guinea pig. Student members (who often can't afford to travel to the conference) will have the option of presenting their posters virtually to a panel of place-based judges.



## Experience, If Not Success

### NACS's Pilot of an Online Component to CAMEX

CAMEX, the annual campus marketing expo hosted by the National Association of College Stores (NACS), is the largest trade show and educational event in the \$10.2 billion college store industry. With a well-established business model and more than 80 years of history, it was not an easy target for change, but change is exactly what the NACS educational team set out to do in 2010 with a two-year pilot to provide an online component to the event.

"We felt like there were good options for adding value to the face-to-face event," said Tony Ellis, CAE, chief knowledge officer of NACS. "We hoped that a virtual aspect of the conference would both add value to the face-to-face event and expose more members to the online platform we use in other parts of our educational programming."

To deliver the virtual portion of CAMEX, Ellis and his team used iCohere, a platform that enabled them to host pre-recorded presentations combined with discussion capabilities and handouts. NACS created a total of 11 pre-recorded sessions using Articulate Presenter, a tool that facilitates blending PowerPoint slides and audio voice-over to create Web-friendly presentations.

"We choose high-demand topics around which attendees were likely to want to share information and knowledge with each other," said Ellis. "We also put a lot of effort into coaching our presenters and discussion leaders to help ensure they would be as successful as possible in the virtual environment."

Key stakeholders at NACS were on board with adding a virtual component to CAMEX, so long as it did not interfere with the revenue generation of the face-to-face event. The majority of that revenue comes from the trade show—the exhibitor fees and sponsorships. "We had to be careful about rocking the boat," Ellis said. But given that only about a third of NACS members attend the annual event, Ellis acknowledged that "there were still a lot of people out there we weren't reaching."

A screen shot of the virtual component of CAMEX 2010



**"In the end, our two-year pilot helped us better understand the value our members place on the face-to-face CAMEX event."**

**Tony Ellis, chief knowledge officer**

NACS created pre-recorded sessions using Articulate Presenter for the online CAMEX in 2010.

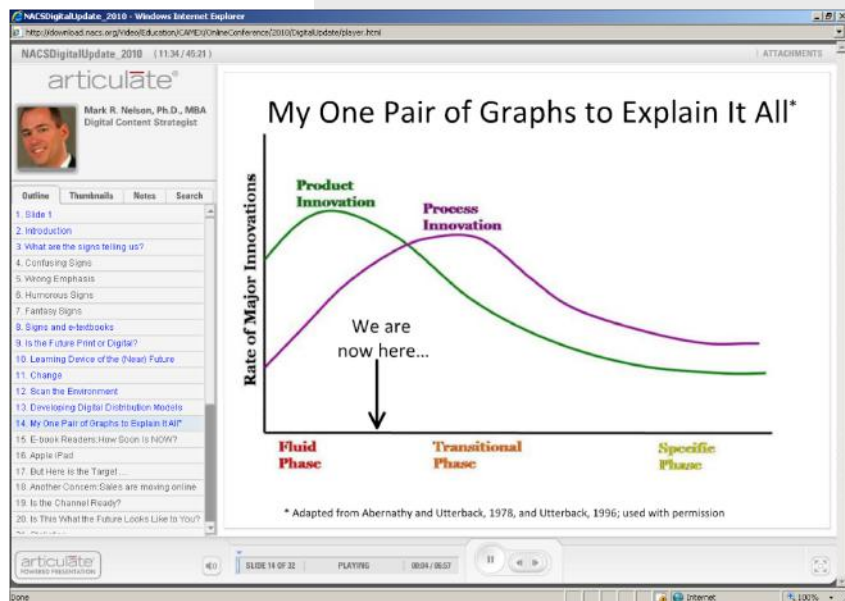
NACS did not include any trade show activities in the virtual version of CAMEX 2010, and, to help address fears that the online event might cannibalize face-to-face attendance, NACS promoted the event primarily to individuals registered for the face-to-face version of CAMEX. Additionally, virtual-only attendees were charged a fee of \$295 while those registered for the face-to-face event were allowed to access the virtual sessions at no charge.

In the end, NACS attracted more than 70 attendees in 2010, which, according to Ellis, “was more than we had hoped for.” While the pre-recorded sessions were generally well received by participants, Ellis noted that there was significant discussion on only a few topics. “One of our key lessons learned,” said Ellis, “was to keep the structure of the content and the related discussions as simple as possible.”

In the second year of its pilot, NACS created a standalone virtual conference that used content from the 2011 CAMEX event and was scheduled to occur several months later. “We used the same platform and overall approach,” said Ellis, “but the 2011 event was scheduled to steer clear of the timing conflicts faced by the 2010 version.” The 2010 event had targeted CAMEX attendees who were busy preparing for, attending, or recovering from the annual face-to-face event; the 2010 timing was equally bad for the secondary audience in 2010—members not attending the face-to-face event, many of whom were left behind to manage store operations on lean numbers. “It was our hope that a late July offering in 2011 would find many more members able to participate in the event,” explained Ellis.

But marketing efforts in 2011 resulted in only a sobering handful of registrants, and NACS decided to offer the program at no cost to those interested. The participants were queried afterward to learn about their motivations for attending, their thoughts on the value proposition of the program, and other insights.

“In the end, our two-year pilot helped us better understand the value our members place on the face-to-face CAMEX event,” Ellis said. “Our industry has a plethora of education options, and there just might not be a strong need for virtual conference experiences until some consolidation occurs.” In the meantime, NACS continues to investigate how virtual conferences and trade shows might provide value and access to the industry. Ellis concluded, “Some ideas are just ahead of their time, even when all the indicators suggest the time is right.”



# The Newest Standard Part of HFMA's Education Portfolio

## The Virtual Healthcare Finance Conference

The Healthcare Financial Management Association (HFMA) is dedicated to product innovation, so it was inevitable that virtual events became a topic of discussion as the team considered additional education options for their members. "Out of a membership base of over 36,000, only so many can be reached through the annual conference and other place-based events," said Marie Bass, HFMA's director of education. "We had already ventured into the world of Webcasts and self-paced online learning, so a virtual conference seemed like a logical choice for further innovation. We also liked the fact that our vendor partners would have the opportunity to have a presence with our members in a unique and cutting-edge format."

HFMA decided to hold its first Virtual Healthcare Finance Conference in January 2010 and has planned three more virtual events (December 2010, December 2011, and April 2012). True to the organization's culture, it set clear objectives for the first event:

- Extend virtual education presence with leading HFMA-branded content, in a convenient and cost-effective manner for healthcare providers.
- Provide another opportunity (outside of the annual meeting) for attendees to visit the exhibit hall and view new products from the convenience of their office.
- Provide HFMA constituents with job search support and access to recruiters.
- Extend membership to other markets (C-suite).
- Provide continuing professional education (CPE) credit and education hours to chapter attendees.
- Achieve an excellent rating of the program by 55 percent of attendees (a target similar to HFMA's education satisfaction goals for its place-based annual meeting).

In considering its options for the event, HFMA decided to create a new, standalone conference that was completely separate from its annual meeting and other place-based events. "We did have some concern about the virtual conference cannibalizing the live events," said Bass, "but that has not happened. In fact, the virtual event allowed us to connect again with our members in a tangible way and solidified the fact that HFMA continues to push the envelope by providing high-quality

**"We did have some concern about the virtual conference cannibalizing the live events, but that has not happened."**

Marie Bass, director of education







An exhibitor booth at HFMA's Virtual Healthcare Finance Conference

education, regardless of the venue. Attendance at all of our live events subsequent to the virtual conference exceeded our expectations.” Bass added that while it is not clear there was a causal relationship between the virtual events and success with live event registrations, it is clear there was not a negative effect.

HFMA also decided to fund the event through sponsorships and exhibitor fees—an approach that works well in the competitive healthcare market. As a result, it was possible to provide HFMA member attendees with free access to the event. In addition to not having to pay a fee, members could earn continuing education credits for attending the live events at the conference—an attractive benefit for a significant portion of HFMA’s audience.

To deliver the virtual events, HFMA provides attendees with a combination of live Webcast sessions, recorded sessions, document downloads, and chat tools. Nearly 3,000 individuals registered for the first event, and a total of 1,775 logged into the platform over the two-day period in which live sessions were offered. In addition, the tracking capabilities of the platform showed nearly 9,000 visits to vendor exhibit booths and nearly 9,000 document downloads. Since that first virtual conference, HFMA has continued to grow the number of sponsors, exhibitors, and attendees.

Attendees were clearly pleased with the first event. More than half reported they were “extremely likely” to recommend the virtual conference to a colleague, more than 80 percent found all aspects of the virtual conference easy to use, and 67 percent rated the content as excellent. HFMA’s speakers also found the event worthwhile—they gave an average rating of 4.5 out of 5 when asked if they “enjoyed the experience and would do it again.”

Over time the HFMA virtual conference has evolved. A new feature that’s been a big hit with exhibitors allows for scheduled vendor chats in a virtual networking lounge. HFMA also now trains vendors on how to engage conversations in the virtual exhibit hall, which is very different from what happens at a live meeting. For the meeting in April 2012, HFMA plans to host a two-day live event, provide the on-demand platform for four months, and close with an additional one-day live event. This plan provides members and exhibitors the ability to view the educational content as well as the exhibit hall products for longer. Having an additional live day to close the event provides the stimulus to bring attendees back to the virtual conference and earn additional CPE credits. And that final live day falls 10 weeks before the place-based annual meeting, allowing HFMA to provide an overview of the annual meeting and promote attendance.

Overall, HFMA considers the virtual events to be successful options for communicating with members, and they are now a standard part of HFMA’s education portfolio. “There’s definitely interest from the membership side,” said Bass, “and there is great interest from the exhibitor sales side, as well. Associations need to continually find ways to enhance the value of dues investments for members. As long as HFMA members continue to see the value of the virtual conferences, we’ll take the opportunity to offer them this as a benefit.”

## Taking Care of Business—for a While NFRC's Virtual Business Meetings

While annual meetings and educational events grab much of the attention when it comes to virtual events, it was business meetings that got the National Fenestration Rating Council (NFRC) to go virtual.

NFRC provides energy performance ratings that help the general public, businesses, and the government make informed decisions about a range of fenestration products (windows, doors, skylights, and others). Staying on top of new products and trends requires significant, ongoing collaboration with NFRC's nearly 250 member organizations. Practically speaking, this means multiple meetings each year at which member volunteers play a hands-on role.

"We've traditionally had three meetings per year," said Cheryl Gendron, NFRC's meetings manager, "and these are hardworking meetings where our volunteers actually contribute significantly to our documents." As a way to reduce NFRC's own expenditures and to reduce travel and time costs for member volunteers, Gendron said, "we saw [virtual meetings] as a natural solution."

In July 2010, NFRC used the Citrix GoToWebinar platform (which it had already been using to offer Webinars to members) to re-create, over a period of three days, what had historically been a four-day face-to-face meeting. "There was definitely a fear of doing anything different," Gendron recalled, "at both the staff and the membership level." To offset this fear, Gendron made sure that plenty of practice took place before the event, including two training sessions for members and multiple rehearsals with staff. "Staff resisted the dress rehearsals," she said. "They would say, 'We know how to do GoToMeetings,' but at every single dress rehearsal, we found new things that we hadn't thought of. Every time."

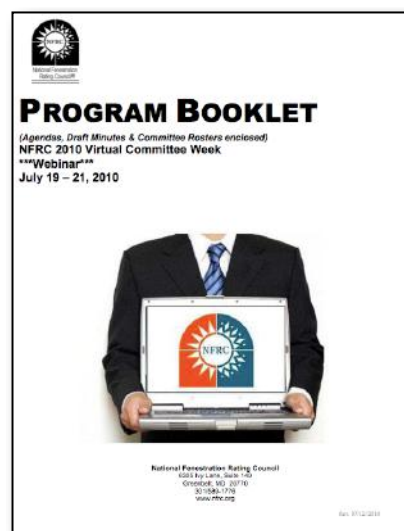
Despite Gendron's attention to detail, the July 2010 meeting hit a final snag: a power outage in NFRC's offices that almost brought the event to a halt. Fortunately, an off-site staff person was able to take the controls and keep the meeting running smoothly while on-site staff re-grouped.

Overall reaction from members to the first event was very positive, according to Gendron. "One of my board members said, 'I thought it was going to be a disaster, but it worked out great.' That's a direct quote from our evaluations." Even so, there were some who "hated it with a capital H." "They couldn't get their agendas across without the networking that goes on in the hallways between the sessions or the after-hours schmoozing that goes along with a face-to-face conference."

In July 2011, NFRC ran its second virtual business meeting, with about the same participation as the prior year (roughly, 130 attendees). Gendron again held trainings and dress rehearsals

**"We've traditionally had three meetings per year, and these are hardworking meetings where our volunteers actually contribute significantly to our documents."**

**Cheryl Gendron, NFRC's meetings manager**





before the meeting, she “overstaffed” customer support to make sure anyone with problems could get them resolved quickly, and she had a generator, in case another power outage hit. Of course, the electricity stayed on this time—but Gendron rested easier with that eventuality addressed.

Despite two years of experience, NFRC won’t be holding a virtual business meeting in 2012. The organization opted to drop one of its three business meetings to allow for more time for work between gatherings. From a timing perspective, the virtual meeting, held in the summer, was the logical one to drop, leaving in-person spring and fall meetings. Gendron speculated that the limited time and ability for networking and “off the record” tête-à-têtes may have played a secondary role in the virtual meeting’s suspension.

An NFRC blog post discusses the power outage that threatened NFRC’s first virtual business meeting.

Gendron said NFRC will still make use of virtual meetings but on a smaller scale—for task groups and possibly subcommittees rather than the full membership. Gendron doesn’t see the decision not to hold the virtual meeting this year as a reflection on the quality of what NFRC has done in the past. She’s proud of and confident in the “infrastructure” (paperwork, training materials, processes, generator, etc.) NFRC has in place. Poised to pick back up should the board or membership or both come clamoring for more virtual events in the future, Gendron said, “We know how to do this. We have it down.”



# NFRC NEWS NOW

7/21/2010

## Neither Rain Nor Sleet Nor Dark of Night...



Participants in NFRC's first Virtual Meeting may not have realized it, but NFRC headquarters experienced a power outage in the middle of the Attachments Subcommittee meeting Tuesday afternoon.

Fortunately, NFRC IT Manager Maggy Thomas had created a contingency plan for just such an occurrence.

Thomas took swift action after the lights went out, executing the plan behind the scenes. She also worked on restoring NFRC email and phone servers, which went down as a result of the outage, too.

Meetings Manager Cheryl Gendron and Certification Program Associate Sherri Wendt ensured a smooth transition as Wendt took control of the meeting remotely from Minnesota, while other NFRC staff members provided support by troubleshooting technical issues.

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## Extending Value Virtually ANCC's Virtual Poster Session

The annual National Magnet Conference® held by the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) continues to lead the way for technology applications supporting nursing continuing education. In 2011, ANCC expanded its virtual poster session, in which individuals presented outcomes of important initiatives at their institutions to a growing global audience. In planning for the 2011 conference, ANCC increased the number of poster presentations offered through the use of a Web-based 3D immersive gaming platform for poster presentation. ANCC was able to double the number of virtual posters accepted for presentation in 2011 and added features designed to attract users to the environment—and keep them engaged there.

**“This first year was a pilot.... [R]egistration was free, and we viewed the virtual world as more of a tool to help drive attendance at the Magnet Conference.”**

**Regina Coll, manager of technology at ANCC's Credentialing Knowledge Center**

Leveraging its existing abstract submission process, ANCC recruited a total of 60 organizations to present posters in an online environment. Working with virtual events provider Digitell, ANCC created a 3D online exhibit hall where visitors, making use of avatars (3D simulations of themselves), could move from booth to booth and view the poster presentations. In addition to viewing the posters in the virtual environment, participants could download them and listen to a brief audio presentation prepared by each presenter.

The virtual poster sessions were designed to be asynchronous (delivered to the user on-demand) to provide users the most scheduling flexibility. The environment was launched in September for the 2011 conference, with the previous years' posters also available for viewing 24/7.

Users must register to participate and download a free Web utility to access the environment. As of the first quarter of 2012, more than 1,500 individuals have registered to access the virtual poster session—a threefold increase since 2010.

“The first year was a pilot,” explained Regina Coll, manager of technology at ANCC's Credentialing Knowledge Center. “In 2010, registration was free, and we viewed the virtual world as more of a tool

to help drive attendance at the Magnet Conference. For 2011, we structured the content to meet nursing continuing education requirements, so we were able to confer CE post-event for conference participants. This was a tremendous value-add for conference registrants who have to prioritize professional development funds to best meet their career goals. Adding the CE component to the environment drove participation, no doubt about this,” said Coll. While the virtual event remains free of charge to all registrants, only conference attendees can be awarded continuing education. This was designed to make the experience accessible to all users worldwide. “We have a growing international audience,” said Coll, “and extending beyond our physical borders is now possible.”

As part of continuing education evaluation, ANCC included a post-session virtual poster evaluation survey to measure achievement of continuing education goals associated with the virtual posters. The overall score for the 60 posters was 4.34 (out of a possible high score of 5) using a standard Likert scale.

A critical aspect of attracting visitors to the virtual environment was to involve key ANCC staff and volunteers. ANCC created a promotional video for the event that featured Cynthia Sweeney, director of ANCC’s Institute for Credentialing Innovation, in avatar form. Additionally, avatars were created for the director of the Magnet Recognition Program® and staff from the virtual sessions’ first event sponsor, Siemens.

“One of our biggest challenges is sustainability,” said Coll and noted that making the virtual experience “stickier” will be one of ANCC’s main goals going forward. Instead of the virtual platform serving as a destination for a one-time event, ANCC hopes to use it to provide ongoing value. “To this end, we added a number of enhancements in 2011 to make the environment more attractive—these included a theatre-style film festival, which captures video of our participating hospitals; a virtual art gallery filled with JPEGs of art work submitted to the on-site art gallery; and, finally, to coincide with the year’s theme, we added a nursing history room filled with images and links to nursing history.”

“We’re considering a number of approaches to attract people back to the platform on a regular basis,” said Coll. “We hope to build a classroom adjacent to the poster hall and hold a live educational event this year. If all goes well, we expect to use the virtual world as a separate educational delivery platform with text, audio, and video media available to participants. ANCC’s on the leading edge of this initiative in nursing continuing education, and it’s exciting to be part of this new virtual world.”

An avatar in ANCC’s virtual environment



*The Institute for Credentialing Innovation®, Magnet Recognition Program®, Magnet®, and National Magnet Conference® are trademarks of the American Nurses Credentialing Center (“ANCC”). The products and services of Tagoras, Inc. are neither sponsored nor endorsed by ANCC.*

## Online Resource Center Beyond the Report Covers

To supplement this report, we have created an online resource center for virtual events, which can be accessed at <http://www.tagoras.com/resources/virtual-events>.

The online center include resources like the following:

- A list of virtual events vendors, with a concentration on companies that have solid experience serving trade and professional associations
- Our “20 Tips for Successful Virtual Events” that, just as the title says, offers tips to help you make your virtual event a success
- Links to the Web pages or micro-sites for a range of association virtual events to help you see what other organizations are doing
- Links to videos created by associations to help promote their virtual events and educate their prospective attendees



For resources, see  
<http://www.tagoras.com/resources/virtual-events>.



## Survey Data Summary Responses

At the core of this report is a survey of 107 associations conducted in November and December 2011. Neither the size nor the sampling method for the data collected in these surveys was sufficient for the results be considered statistically valid. Our goal with the survey was not to draw broad conclusions about virtual events in the sector—we are still too early in the adoption cycle for that—but rather to gather what information we could about the small subset of associations that have offered or plan to offer virtual events. Taken in this light, we feel the data offered here provides significant insights for organizations interested in or planning virtual events.

Please note that whenever data was not collected, the results are marked N/A, or not applicable.

### All Respondents

The following question, in addition to the demographic questions that come at the end of the survey data, was asked of all survey respondents.

#### USE OF VIRTUAL EVENTS

Please read the following definition carefully before answering the question.

A virtual event is a Web-based event that replicates many aspects of a traditional place-based conference, membership meeting, or trade show. It may take place on a standalone basis or in conjunction with a place-based conference (i.e., a “hybrid” event). Virtual events feature *multiple* sessions (*not* just a single Webinar or Webcast) and may include keynote presentations, training and education workshops, discussion areas, social networking opportunities, exhibit areas for vendors, and various other features. Activities in a virtual event may take place in real time (synchronously), on demand (asynchronously), or some combination of the two.

Has your organization previously offered a virtual event? (100 responses)

Yes	38.0%
No	62.0%

### Respondents Who Previously Offered a Virtual Event

The following questions were asked only of organizations indicating they had previously offered a virtual event.

#### NUMBER OF PREVIOUSLY OFFERED VIRTUAL EVENTS

How many times has your organization offered a virtual event? (38 responses)

1	26.3%
2	21.1%
3	7.9%
4	2.6%
5 or more	42.1%

### LENGTH OF PREVIOUSLY OFFERED VIRTUAL EVENT

How long did your virtual event last, not including any time after the event when archives were accessible? (If you have offered more than one event, please indicate the length of a typical event.) (36 responses)

Less than one day	36.1%
One day to one half days	19.4%
More than one and a half days to two days	8.3%
More than two days to two and a half days	5.6%
More than two and a half days to three days	5.6%
More than three days	8.3%
Other	16.7%

### REGISTRATIONS FOR PREVIOUSLY OFFERED VIRTUAL EVENTS

How did registrations for your virtual event compare to your expectations? (If you have offered more than one virtual event, please answer based on a typical event.) (35 responses)

The number of registrations exceeded our expectations.	17.1%
The number of registrations was about what we expected.	45.7%
The number of registrations was lower than we expected.	37.1%

### ATTENDANCE FOR PREVIOUSLY OFFERED VIRTUAL EVENTS

Approximately what percentage of registrants actually attended your virtual event? (If you have offered more than one virtual event, please answer based on a typical event.) (32 responses)

Average	Median
51.5%	30.0%

### ATTENDANCE AT VIRTUAL VERSUS PLACE-BASED EVENTS

How did attendance at your virtual event compare to typical attendance for a comparable place-based event? (If you have offered more than one virtual event, please answer based on typical event.) (35 responses)

Attendance was greater than for a comparable place-based event.	5.7%
Attendance was the same as for a comparable place-based event.	14.3%
Attendance was less than for a comparable place-based event.	68.6%
We do not offer a comparable place-based event.	11.4%



## EVALUATIONS OF VIRTUAL VERSUS PLACE-BASED EVENTS

How did evaluations for the virtual event compare to evaluations you typically receive for a comparable place-based event? (If you have offered more than one virtual event, please answer based on a typical event.) (33 responses)

Attendees gave higher evaluation scores for the virtual event.	3.0%
Attendees gave the same or very similar evaluation scores for the virtual event.	63.6%
Attendees gave lower evaluation scores for the virtual event.	21.2%
We do not offer a comparable place-based event.	12.1%

## PLANS FOR ADDITIONAL VIRTUAL EVENTS

Do you plan to offer another virtual event in the future? (34 responses)

Yes	73.5%
No	8.8%
Not sure	17.6%

## Respondents Who Previously Offered a Virtual Event or Are Planning to Offer a Virtual Event

The following questions were asked of both organizations that had previously held a virtual event and those planning to offer one.

## REASONS FOR OFFERING A VIRTUAL EVENT

Why did your organization decide to offer a virtual event? Check all that apply.

	Previous virtual event (38 responses)	Planned virtual event (38 responses)
To reach members who would not otherwise attend our place-based events	94.7%	86.8%
To compensate for declining attendance at our place-based events	15.8%	21.1%
To reduce the costs for our organization to offer a conference	26.3%	31.6%
To reduce the costs for our members to attend a conference	28.9%	50.0%
To be perceived as embracing cutting-edge approaches to serving our members	63.2%	60.5%
To help familiarize our members with online education and meeting technologies	34.2%	39.5%
To support an overall strategy to deliver more services online	63.2%	68.4%
Other	18.4%	15.8%

## ELEMENTS OF VIRTUAL EVENTS

Which of the following elements did your virtual event include, or, at this point in your planning, which of the following elements do you think your virtual event will include? (If you have offered more than one virtual event, please indicate the elements a typical virtual event includes.) Check all that apply.

	Previous virtual event (36 responses)	Planned virtual event (37 responses)
Live Webinar sessions (e.g., audio plus slides)	52.8%	70.3%
Live streaming video or Webcast sessions	50.0%	67.6%
On-demand Webinar sessions (e.g., audio plus slides)	44.4%	48.6%
On-demand video or Webcast sessions	33.3%	40.5%
Discussion boards	33.3%	54.1%
Real-time text communication between participants	27.8%	56.8%
Real-time voice communication between participants	11.1%	10.8%
Avatars for participants	8.3%	8.1%
Virtual exhibit hall	16.7%	35.1%
Archives after the virtual event ends	66.7%	75.7%
Other	2.8%	2.7%

## TIMING OF VIRTUAL EVENTS

Which of the following best describes the timing of your previously held or planned virtual event? (If you have held more than one virtual event, please answer based on a typical event.)

	Previous virtual event (36 responses)	Planned virtual event (35 responses)
The virtual event was/will be held at the same time as a place-based event.	38.9%	31.4%
The virtual event was/will be held at a different time from a place-based event but was/will be associated with the place-based event.	33.3%	17.1%
The virtual event was/will be held at a different time than any place-based events and was/will be an entirely separate event.	25.0%	42.9%
Other	2.8%	8.6%

## FINANCIAL GOALS OF VIRTUAL EVENTS

Which statement best describes the financial goals of your previously held or planned virtual event? (If you have offered more than one virtual event, please answer based on a typical event.)

	Previous virtual event (35 responses)	Planned virtual event (35 responses)
Wanted it to/must be self-sustaining (i.e., at least break even), but profitability (positive net revenue) wasn't/isn't required	34.3%	57.1%
Wanted it to/must be self-sustaining and profitable (positive net revenue)	57.1%	28.6%
Didn't/doesn't need to be self-sustaining	8.6%	14.3%

## FEE FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS

Did you charge or do you plan to charge registrants for the virtual event? (If you have offered more than one virtual event, please answer based on a typical event.)

	Previous virtual event (35 responses)	Planned virtual event (35 responses)
We charged/plan to charge non-members but not members.	5.7%	14.3%
We charged/plan to charge all registrants—both members and non-members.	68.6%	62.9%
We did not charge/do not plan to charge.	17.1%	0.0%
Other	8.6%	22.9%

## LEVEL OF FEE FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS

Which of the following best describes the amount you charged or plan to charge for the virtual event? (If you have offered more than one virtual event, please answer based on a typical event.)

	Previous virtual event (29 responses)	Planned virtual event (30 responses)
We charged/plan to charge significantly less than what we charge for a comparable place-based event.	44.8%	33.3%
We charged/plan to charge somewhat less than what we charge for a comparable place-based event.	37.9%	46.7%
We charged/plan to charge the same as we charge for a comparable place-based event.	10.3%	13.3%
We charged/plan to charge somewhat more than what we charge for a comparable place-based event.	0.0%	0.0%
We charged/plan to charge significantly more than what we charge for a comparable place-based event.	0.0%	0.0%
We do not offer a comparable place-based event.	6.9%	6.7%

## SPONSORSHIP AND EXHIBITOR REVENUE FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS

Did your virtual event generate or do you plan for it to generate revenue from sponsorships or exhibitor fees? (If you have offered more than one virtual event, please answer based on a typical event.)

	Previous virtual event (34 responses)	Planned virtual event (33 responses)
Yes, we generated / plan to generate revenue from both sponsorships and exhibitor fees.	2.9%	36.4%
Yes, we generated / plan to generate revenue from sponsorships.	20.6%	27.3%
Yes, we generated / plan to generate revenue from exhibitor fees.	5.9%	6.1%
No, we did not / do not plan to generate revenue from sponsorships or exhibitor fees.	70.6%	30.3%

## CONTINUING EDUCATION CREDIT FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS

Did you offer or do you plan to offer continuing education credit for attending your virtual event? (If you have offered more than one virtual event, please answer based on a typical event.)

	Previous virtual event (34 responses)	Planned virtual event (34 responses)
Yes, we offered / plan to offer continuing education credit for all parts of the virtual event.	41.2%	32.4%
Yes, we offered / plan to offer continuing education credit but only for the real-time (synchronous) education sessions.	8.8%	14.7%
Yes, we offered / plan to offer continuing education credit but only for the on-demand (asynchronous) education sessions.	5.9%	2.9%
No, we did not / do not plan to offer continuing education credit.	41.2%	32.4%
Other	2.9%	17.6%

## TECHNOLOGY FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS

Which of the following technologies and/or service providers did you use or do you plan to use to deliver your virtual event? Check all that apply. (If you have offered more than one virtual event, please answer based on a typical event.)

	Previous virtual event (34 responses)	Planned virtual event (34 responses)
6Connex	5.9%	0.0%
Adobe Connect	14.7%	0.0%
Blue Sky Broadcast	5.9%	0.0%
CGS VirtualEvents365	8.8%	0.0%
CommPartners	8.8%	0.0%
Conference 2.0 (OmniPress)	2.9%	0.0%
Digitell	5.9%	0.0%
GoToMeeting	26.5%	2.9%
iCohere	2.9%	0.0%
INXPO	5.9%	0.0%
KRM	2.9%	0.0%
Microsoft Live Meeting	5.9%	0.0%
ON24	0.0%	0.0%
Peach New Media	5.9%	0.0%
Performedia	0.0%	0.0%
Unisfair	5.9%	0.0%
WebEx	8.8%	0.0%
Other	32.4%	0.0%
Didn't specify	N/A	5.9%
Don't know yet	N/A	91.2%

## Respondents Planning and Not Planning to Offer a Virtual Event

The following questions were asked of organizations that indicated they had not previously offered a virtual event.

### PLANS TO OFFER VIRTUAL EVENTS

Do you plan to offer a virtual event in the future? (63 responses)

Yes, we will offer a virtual event within the next 12 months.	20.6%
Yes, but it will be more than 12 months from now before we offer a virtual event.	36.5%
No, we have no plans to offer a virtual event.	42.9%

## CONCERNS ABOUT VIRTUAL EVENTS

What concerns you most about offering a virtual event, or what are the major reasons your organization will not be offering a virtual event? Check all that apply.

	Planned virtual event (33 responses)	No planned virtual event (27 responses)
We are concerned about the cost of offering a virtual event.	66.7%	29.6%
We are concerned about the complexity of the technology.	42.4%	44.4%
We are concerned we will not get the level of attendance we hope for.	54.5%	48.1%
We are concerned it will hurt attendance at our place-based events.	27.3%	51.9%
We are concerned about the quality of the learning experience.	54.5%	48.1%
Other	6.1%	25.9%

## Respondent Profile Data

The following questions were asked of all respondents.

### ASSOCIATION MANAGEMENT COMPANY

Do you work for your organization through an association management company? (101 responses)

Yes	9.9%
No	90.1%

### TYPE OF ORGANIZATION

Which of the following best characterizes your organization? (95 responses)

Trade association	26.3%
Professional society	69.5%
Other	4.2%

### INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP

How many active *individual* members does your organization currently have? (95 responses)

1,000 or less	9.5%
1,001 to 5,000	25.3%
5,001 to 10,000	11.6%
10,001 to 25,000	21.1%
25,001 to 50,000	11.6%
50,001 to 100,000	6.3%
More than 100,000	2.1%
We have only organizational members.	12.6%



## ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

How many active *organizational* (e.g., corporate) members does your organization currently have? (95 responses)

Less than 100	23.2%
101 to 200	11.6%
201 to 500	7.4%
501 to 1,000	7.4%
1,001 to 5,000	12.6%
More than 5,000	1.1%
We have only individual members.	36.8%

## BUDGET SIZE

What is your organization's annual budget? (94 responses)

Less than \$100,000	0.0%
\$100,001 to \$500,000	4.3%
\$500,001 to \$1,000,000	11.7%
\$1,000,001 to \$5,000,000	31.9%
\$5,000,001 to \$10,000,000	21.3%
\$10,000,001 to \$25,000,000	17.0%
\$25,000,001 to \$50,000,000	5.3%
\$50,000,001 to \$100,000,000	6.4%
More than \$100,000,000	2.1%

## STAFF

How many paid staff does your organization currently have? (95 responses)

1	3.2%
2 to 5	10.5%
6 to 10	12.6%
11 to 15	12.6%
16 to 30	11.6%
31 to 50	15.8%
50 to 100	18.9%
101 to 250	8.4%
251 to 500	5.3%
More than 500	1.1%

## GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

Which best describes the geographic focus of your organization (i.e., which best indicates the areas in which you actively solicit membership)? (95 responses)

Single-community or municipality focus	0.0%
Multiple-community focus within one state	2.1%
Single-state or province focus	12.6%
Multi-state or multi-province focus	4.2%
National focus	38.9%
International focus	42.1%

## LOCATION OF HEADQUARTERS

Where is your organization headquartered? (95 responses)

In the United States	96.8%
In Canada	3.2%
In another country	0.0%

## CLASSIFICATION

Which of the following classifications (from the North American Industry Classification System, or NAICS) most closely aligns with the audience served by your organization? If you wish to review the classifications to see where your organization fits, you may do so at <http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/sssd/naics/naicsrch?chart=2007>. (95 responses)

Administrative and support and waste management and remediation services	1.1%	Mining	0.0%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting	0.0%	Professional, scientific, and technical services	17.9%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	1.1%	Public administration	6.3%
Construction	5.3%	Real estate and rental and leasing	1.1%
Education services	12.6%	Retail trade	3.2%
Finance and insurance	5.3%	Transportation and warehousing	2.1%
Healthcare and social assistance	22.1%	Utilities	0.0%
Information	6.3%	Wholesale trade	1.1%
Management of companies and enterprises	2.1%	Other	9.5%
Manufacturing	3.2%		

## About Tagoras Publisher of the Report

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*Association Learning Management Systems, Association Learning + Technology, and Learning 2.0 for Associations.*



### About the Authors

All the research and writing for this report were done by Tagoras principals Jeff Cobb and Celisa Steele.

#### JEFF COBB

A managing director at Tagoras, Jeff has nearly two decades of experience in the world of marketing, education, and technology. He was cofounder and CEO of Isoph, a leading provider of e-learning technologies and services to associations. He has also served as senior vice president of business development for Quisic, an e-learning partner to top-tier business schools and fortune 500 companies, and as vice president of business development for LearnSomething.

Jeff is an award-winning teacher, author of the highly popular *Learning 2.0 for Associations*, and co-author of *Shift Ed: A Call to Action for Transforming K-12 Education* ([www.shiftedtransformation.com](http://www.shiftedtransformation.com)), published by Corwin. His next book, *Leading the Learning Revolution*, will be published by AMACOM in the summer of 2012. He has served on ASAE's Professional Development Section Council, as well as on the research committee of the eLearning Guild



and the editorial board of *Innovate*, a leading resource on technology and education.

Jeff speaks frequently about the impact of new technologies on business, education, and society in general. More information about his speaking is available on his personal Web site at [www.jeffthomascobb.com](http://www.jeffthomascobb.com).

#### CELISA STEELE

Celisa has led the development of successful online education sites with smaller groups like the Frameworks Institute and the Alliance of Chicago Community Health Services and large national and multinational organizations like the American Red Cross, the American College of Radiology, the Society for Human Resource Management, and WebJunction, an initiative of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Celisa is a managing director at Tagoras, where she serves as editor-in-chief of the company's research publications. She was cofounder and COO of Isoph, one of the leading providers of e-learning services to the nonprofit sector. Prior to Isoph, she worked in creative services at Quisic, a developer of high-end online course content for major universities and Global 2000 companies. Before joining Quisic, Celisa worked in curriculum development for the not-for-profit Family and Children's Resource Program (FCRP), part of the Jordan Institute for Families at the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

A veteran of the e-learning world, Celisa has served on the research committee of the eLearning Guild and, multiple times, as a judge in Brandon Hall's annual e-learning awards. She currently serves on ASAE's Professional Development Section Council.

Celisa is a published poet ([www.celisasteele.com](http://www.celisasteele.com)).