

The Event Industry

FutureNow is an independent body that provides industry informed advice to influence skills development strategies across the creative and leisure sectors. Our work assists Western Australia to be prepared with the new order skills required by the evolving economy and our changing society.

# The Events Industry represents a diverse range of business, community, and social gatherings such as trade and consumer exhibitions, festivals, concerts, charity races and private weddings and celebrations. Events are critically important for the accommodation and food services sector as a driver for visitor engagement and give people a time-specific reason to visit an area and are an important way of supporting local businesses and the economy as they bring additional visitors to the state. The WA Visitor Economy Strategy (WAVES 2033) outlines an ambition for Western Australia to double the value of the WA visitor economy by 20331. A key facet of realising this vision involves the strategic promotion of events within the state.

**The sector’s current challenges**

Event Costs

The rising costs of conducting business continue to have ongoing impacts on both companies and individual consumers, resulting in less disposable funds allocated to meetings and events. Companies and individuals hosting small-scale events are leaning towards virtual or hybrid events due to their cost-effectiveness. There will always be however a need for face to face gatherings as relationship building are key business goals that are not easily executed virtually2.

The live sector is in talks with governments about short-term solutions as cost-of-living pressures have forced the cancellation of five small-to-medium festivals within the first weeks of 2024. Event costs are up 40 percent across the board, and organisers are not able to raise ticket prices to the same level, therefore the economics of festivals are becoming more difficult in this current environment3.

**Where is the sector now?**

Government Recognition of Events

Released in 2023 Tourism WA's Vision for Dream Events blueprint, aims to make Perth and Western Australia the fastest growing events destination in the South East Asian region4.

Business Events

# Business Events Perth (BE Perth), funded by the Western Australian government, Tourism WA, the City of Perth, and state-wide partners, secured 248 national and international business events for the 2022–23 financial year. These events, scheduled up to 2026, are anticipated to inject over $320 million into the state's economy through direct delegate expenditure, involving 78,517 delegates and 262,942 hotel room nights. In addition to the economic advantages business events bring to the state, they support economic development, trade and investment opportunities, and the advancement of an educated prosperous society by connecting people for the sharing of knowledge and innovation which is important for the state. These significant legacies contribute further value to the initial direct tourism expenditure of Business Events5.

# In January 2024, the state government announced plans to redevelop the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre. The existing Convention Centre building would be significantly refurbished to increase capacity and capability to attract new major business events6.

# Sporting and Entertainment Events

# In 2023 the State Government through Tourism WA attracted a number of international events at Optus stadium including two sold-out Coldplay shows, the Matildas sold out all three of their Paris Olympic qualifying matches in Perth and the WWE Elimination Chamber. Tens of thousands of visitors travelled to WA for these events and all generated high levels of visitor spend through increased spending in hospitality, accommodation and on tourism experiences. In 2024 Western Australia will be the home of football in July, when English Premier League giants Tottenham Hotspur and West Ham United play at Optus Stadium and in May two of Italy's most successful men's football clubs, AC Milan and AS Roma, will play in an Asia Pacific exclusive match.

# The Arts

# Supported by the state government, both Fringe and the Perth Festival ran full programs of events in January and February this year.

Regional Events

# The WA Government will provide up to $1.1 million in funding for regional events across WA as part of the 2024-25 Regional Events Scheme (RES). This annual RES funding supports smaller and developing events in regional WA, with money available to attract visitors to WA's regions and stimulate local economies. It also provides $250,000 for the Regional Aboriginal Events Scheme (RAES) to support events that showcase and celebrate Aboriginal activities and experiences through the leadership and participation of Aboriginal people7.

Cancellations

# Due to lagging ticket sales, increased production costs, and a lack of volunteers, several regional events have been cancelled in 2024. Census data recorded a 19 percent drop in volunteering in Western Australia. The biggest decline has been recorded in the 15-24 year old age group. The impact of this lack of volunteers is most noticeable in regional areas, where event organisers and first-responders are more likely to be unpaid8.

# Music festival Groovin the Moo has been forced to cancel its upcoming regional tour across Australia, including its South West show9. Fairbridge Festival, the weekend folk music event that has run since 1993, has been cancelled again this year, having not been held since 202110. One of the biggest food festivals in the south west of WA, credited for putting timber town Manjimup on the tourism map, has been cancelled for the first time in two decades11.

More than financial benefits

# Some event industry stakeholders argue that there is a need to re-think why Governments invest in events. There is a belief that it is time for governments to stop seeing events purely as part of “tourism and economic development” and start seeing them first and foremost as contributors to community wellbeing as research suggests that communities are stating that this is what they value most12.

# There is a significant body of research examining the relationship between community celebrations or festivals and community development. The emerging consensus among researchers is that celebrations or festivals can promote community co-operation, bring new talents to a community and develop those within, promote awareness of community issues, reduce the isolation of individuals and groups within the community and promote economic and social development. There is emerging evidence that indicates that communities with high rates of participation by individuals in community activities have better health outcomes than those with low levels of civic engagement13.

# **Event Industry Workforce**

# The Business Events sector in Western Australia faces a challenge due to a shortage of Professional Conference Organisers (PCOs). Pre-COVID, this scarcity was not apparent, but the departure of many professionals from the industry has created a void in experienced conference and event organisers.

# The role of a proficient Conference and Event Organiser demands substantial experience, typically acquired through practical on-the-job learning and post-secondary education. Recognising the urgency, industry stakeholders are advocating for the promotion of this career path to school students. While the inclusion of the Certificate III in events on the "free in '23 and '24" list has increased enrollments in event management courses, there remains a time lag until these graduates accrue sufficient experience to address the industry's current needs.

# Stakeholders report that the events industry is very short of technical staff such as audio visual operators. Stakeholders have stressed the importance of attracting students to the technical side of events, i.e., lighting, sound, production.

# Despite the availability of the SIT 30522 Certificate III being able to be offered as an event traineeship option, its underutilisation stems from a lack of industry awareness so this training option must be more widely publicised by training providers, Jobs and Skills Centre’s and schools, to fill the skill gaps. In early 2023 FutureNow collaborated with Tourism WA to update the Tourism and Hospitality career collateral which drew attention to the event traineeship. Furthermore, there is a growing demand for professional business events sales personnel and individuals with technical event expertise. As the industry evolves, collaboration between educational institutions, industry stakeholders, and government bodies becomes imperative to nurture a skilled workforce and ensure the continued success of the Events sector in Western Australia.

# Future Skills

# To ensure the industry's sustainable future, conference and event organisers will require upskilling with a focus on decarbonisation in decision-making processes. A recent development is the release of the National Sustainability Framework for the tourism sector, featuring a Sustainable Tourism Toolkit, aiding conference and event organisers in aligning events with environmentally conscious practices.

# Artificial Intelligence for events

# There is some concern amongst stakeholders in the events industry as to whether the sector is upskilling quickly enough to meet the growing usage of AI as a technology14. For many, AI is a breath of fresh air, introducing a new level of efficiency and innovation to an industry that thrives on accuracy, data, and seamless coordination. AI tools are well-versed in the complexities of event planning and capable of quickly processing large amounts of information. Event planners are adopting AI tools to automate tasks, revitalise outdated processes, and ultimately enhance the customer experience. Like other industries, event professionals are watching as AI and the ever-growing ecosystem of tools it empowers begin to shape and transform event planning15.

# **Long Term Succession Planning**

# Career Promotion and Development

# The event industry is being showcased as part of an annual program of in-school career information sessions run by Tourism WA, which will support longer-term initiatives aimed at encouraging young people to consider careers in the sector thereby creating a sustainable pipeline of local skilled workers.

# An updated occupational guide with case studies regarding careers in the event Industry has been produced by Tourism WA with input from FutureNow. This collateral has been distributed to schools and the Department of Justice sites via career expos and presentations as well as through the West Australian Jobs and Skills Network16.

# Year 9 Career Taster Program

# The year 9 career taster program is a valuable resource for career development and in 2023 there were two dedicated experiences offered at NMTAFE in the field of Event Management and one offered at the Albany Entertainment Centre focusing on event management17. Industry sees the value in early and greater exposure to the events sector, however, find it is challenging to host students into workplaces due to the risk management issues often present when producing events.

# Skills Training Programs

# The Australian and Western Australian Governments have continued the Skills Agreement commenced in 2022 to address skills shortage. The course list, based on the previous year's enrolments, is estimated to see 1,400 places in the hospitality, tourism and events sectors. The funding supports the new FREE IN '24 initiative, which is designed to reskill and upskill people for work and covers the 12 month course, SIT30522 Certificate III in Events which will be 100% course fee-free as of 1 January 202418.

# Western Australian Jobs, Education and Training Survey

# Annually, FutureNow undertakes work on The Western Australian Jobs, Education and Training Survey (WAJET) Industry Advice Reports and these reports inform the State Priority Occupation Lists (SPOL). The occupation of Conference and Event Organiser (ANZSCO code 149311) has been surveyed for this report.

**We would like to hear from you**

## FutureNow is continually seeking input from stakeholders in the Western Australian Events sector. If you are interested in providing further information about the workforce in this sector, please get in touch with the Industry Development Manager:

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