

Event and Conference Management

The term 'Events' is used to describe an increasingly diverse and rapidly growing sector within Western Australia's tourism, cultural, sporting and recreational landscape.

Industry overview

Growth in this sector is being driven by multiple factors: the public's appetite for unique experiences, a desire for greater community connectedness, and the contribution that an event can make to place-making – particularly in regional areas.

The sector plays a major role in Tourism WA's Two-Year Action Plan. Securing major business, sporting and cultural events will drive visitation, reposition Perth as a world class, vibrant city, and develop regional dispersal through in-region events or pre- and post-event travel opportunities. Through Tourism WA, the Events industry is supported via funding of the Perth Convention Bureau to secure business events, as well as sponsoring a variety of sporting, cultural, arts and culinary events across the State through Major Events Funding; the Regional Events Program for medium to large regional events; and the Regional Events Scheme for smaller regional events.

The scale of events varies according to the type of event and number of attendees. However, a specific level of knowledge and expertise is required for the organisation and successful implementation of any event involving mass participation. Events can be split into three main groups:

- o business events (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions/ trade shows (MICE))
- o community or cultural events (local community, clubs, sporting, culinary/ food & wine, music or performing arts)
- o functions (including weddings, gala balls, banquets and fundraising dinners)

Current and future labour market conditions

Workers within the Event and Conference sector work either in an office planning events, on-site at venues where events are staged or a combination of both. Tasks can include promoting events; negotiating contracts or packages with clients; coordinating ancillary services (catering, venue hire, audio-visual equipment, security/ crowd control, accommodation and transport); processing registrations; and overseeing subcontractors, all within defined budgets and time frames.

Event personnel work across multiple industries and are employed by various businesses ranging from event or exhibition management companies to event venues, function centres, sporting & community clubs, stadia, local councils, or businesses where they are employed as in-house conference or event managers. Workers employed as in-house event coordinators often have joint job descriptions and undertake duties other than strictly for events.

Since events are short-term, and the work is intensive in the lead up, during and immediately post the event, the sector is increasingly recognised as part of the "gig economy". Employment is often temporary and linked to specific projects, which can be difficult for workers to balance across individual events. As such, a very high proportion of event organisers are self-employed freelancers or contract workers, engaged for a fixed period or specific project and often by more than one employer/ client concurrently. For example, independent Professional Conference Organisers (PCO's) are subcontracted to coordinate conferences and exhibitions the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre (PCEC).

There are few full-service Event Management organisations based in WA. The major venues that employ events personnel in WA are based predominantly in Perth and include the Optus Stadium (approximately 2,000 employees), RAC Arena (over 800 people in 80 different job roles), PCEC (up to 350 workers, depending on the event), Crown Perth entertainment complex, and major hotels. The running of an event in regional areas of WA often requires workers with specific skills to travel to the region, meaning events are unlikely to contribute to ongoing employment for events workers in the region.

The events sector comprises a large casual workforce to provide the ancillary services fundamental to managing an event. Workers in catering, food and beverage service, and security are often casual staff contracted for the event. Additionally, the Events industry is heavily reliant on a volunteer workforce that undertake duties including ushering, ticketing and customer service duties during an event. Volunteer management and providing appropriate training for volunteers is critical to the success of individual events and the broader sector. Volunteering is also a valuable pathway to gain practical on-the-job skills for those wanting to enter the industry.

Training in the Events Industry

FutureNow's Events Industry Advisory Group (IAG) report that there are insufficient VET enrolments in Certificate III in Events, Diploma or Advanced Diploma in Events Management to meet industry demand. While the Certificate III in Events is available as an events traineeship, this pathway is not utilised because there are not enough employers that are able to guarantee ongoing work for the 12-month duration of the training contract. In addition, Le Cordon Bleu Perth is no longer accepting enrolments into the Le Cordon Bleu Bachelor of Business (Convention and Event Management) programme.

Furthermore, because there are no barriers to entry, there may be an oversupply of unqualified event coordinators, which impacts on the sector's economic sustainability.

Industry development issues

The sector is growing in parallel to the increase in new event space available, including Optus Stadium in Perth, Red Earth Arts Precinct in Karratha and redeveloped foreshores at Scarborough in Perth and Koombana Bay in Bunbury. Several economically successful events have become regular fixtures on the State's events calendar, due to the ongoing demand for exposure to new experiences, greater community connectedness, and making places accessible that would not ordinarily be considered.

The events industry in WA has however experienced a challenging period in 2018, with several high-profile events management businesses closing. A coordinator of major events in WA, TriEvents Event Management went into administration in July 2018, leaving several scheduled triathlon events without an experienced events management convener. Independent triathlon clubs are expected to manage some events in the interim, although the expertise of TriEvents is unlikely to be easily replaced.

Another business collapse of 2018 was that of JumpClimb Event Management. It left artists, suppliers and venue operators of its shows at Fringe World Festival 2018 out of pocket. It follows the 2017 folding of The Event Agency Australia that allegedly owed suppliers thousands of dollars. The loss of income for suppliers and performers has sparked debate about events management businesses' credentials, governance, economic modelling and risk management practices.

A range of global incidents that have threatened public safety, while incidents at local events in Western Australia, for example extreme weather events, mean that organisers have had to adapt how large-scale events in Western Australia are produced and delivered. This contributes to increased costs and impacts on business viability. However, community safety is paramount and whether it is the risk of terrorism, potential natural disasters, or accidents, the skills and expertise to avoid, mitigate and address a crisis are crucial for Event Managers.

Workforce challenges and issues

Challenges for employment opportunities exist due to the cyclical, short-term nature of events. Since employment in this sector comprises mostly of contingent workers on contract, there is a lack of stable ongoing work for many people within this sector. Similarly, this restricts students from undertaking the Certificate III in Events through a traineeship as few employers can provide ongoing work for the training contract's 12-month duration.

FutureNow's Events IAG maintain that volunteer management is crucial to the ongoing success of the sector, but report there are instances of volunteer mistreatment where limited or unsuitable training and a lack of acknowledgement can result in volunteers leaving the sector and negatively impacting on the broader sector's ability to recruit volunteers.

Due to the sporadic nature of events and the large volume of freelancers, there is a lack of career progression and little support for event workers to progress towards leadership roles in the events sector. To grow leadership skills in the Australian events industry, Tourism Australia and Meetings & Events Australia have launched a national mentoring program, giving mentees the opportunity to connect with an experienced industry representative.

Meetings & Events Australia also coordinates an Accreditation Program for Accredited Meeting Managers (AMM) and Accredited In-House Meeting Managers (AIMM).

Large-scale events which bring large groups of people together can carry the threat of unforeseen incidents, and the skills to avoid, mitigate and address a crisis are crucial to ensure public safety. The Events qualifications in the SIT Training Package will be reviewed in the Tourism, Travel and Hospitality IRC Training Product Review Plan 2016-17 to 2019-20 to address this skill requirement.

References:

1. <https://optusstadium.com.au/about/careers/> accessed 07/09/2018
2. http://www.pertharena.com.au/About_Us/Careers, accessed 07/09/2018
3. Tourism Council of Western Australia, *The Western Australian Tourism Works Atlas*, using ABS cat. No. 5249.0, Tourism Satellite Account 2014-15 and State Tourism Satellite Accounts 2014-15 data
4. ARTRAGE, Fringe World 2018 Impact Report Perth, Western Australia
5. WAtoday, Hannah Barry, *'It's devastating for our sport': Triathletes left in the lurch*, 3 July 2018
6. www.jumpclimb.com
7. WAtoday, Hannah Barry, *'Perth events company breaks silence following collapse'*, 10 May 2018