

Events

The events sector has been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, but has remained adaptive and is starting to see a degree of recovery.

What has happened and where is the sector now?

Workers in the expansive events sector help connect people in the community through entertainment, commemoration, competition, and celebration and bring wide-ranging business sectors together through conferences and exhibitions.

Business events

During 2018-2019, the Perth Convention Bureau (now Business Events Perth) secured business events representing over \$153 million in Direct Delegate Expenditure (DDE), exceeding the annual target of \$148 million. The Perth Convention Bureau estimated that almost 63,000 delegates would attend 264 business events during 2019-2022.¹

Perth Festival

Perth Festival's direct economic impact from spending by audiences, artists and the Festival was \$30.3 million, an increase of 60% from 2019, providing \$84.7 million in flow-on economic value to WA.² Perth Festival is a significant attraction bringing people to Western Australia. Almost a third of interstate and overseas visitors attributed the Festival with being the main reason for travelling to Perth.

Impact of COVID-19

The events industry was one of the first industries to experience material impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. Conferences and expos, cultural and sporting events, festivals, community activities and social events such as weddings were cancelled due to travel restrictions and social distancing limitations.

The events sector has adapted

Despite the comprehensive suspension of industry operations, many event management companies have remained active throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, working closely with their clients, venues, and associated services to reschedule events.

The format of how events were delivered was rapidly adapted. Livestreaming of events has become common for conferences, and certain performances, with some events having now returned in-person.

The sector's current challenges

Range of businesses involved in events

The COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the breadth of the events workforce and the wide variety of intersecting industries. Workers were affected in performing arts, sport, broadcasting and media, audio-visual, production design, equipment hire, set decoration, exhibition and event infrastructure, catering, ushering, travel, ticketing, sponsorship, as well as associated services such as celebrants, florists, and photographers.

Most of these workers operate on a contractual basis (in the case of event organisers) or are employed as casuals and many have been ineligible for the Government's JobKeeper payment³ and are likely to leave the industry.

A lack of ongoing business and funding

There is concern that events companies have not received financial support outside of the JobKeeper scheme for

eligible staff. Some businesses have closed, and auctions of event-infrastructure have occurred in the second half of 2020. There is a risk that the knowledge base and capacity to host major events will greatly decrease in Western Australia due to skilled workers leaving the industry as well as an unavailability of suitable infrastructure such as fencing, seating, staging, and audio-visual equipment. This poses a risk to audience, performer, worker and volunteer health and safety.

Business events

Although some in-person conferences have resumed, there is concern for the ongoing viability of the business events sector. It is uncertain when international attendees will be able to travel to WA for events. The financial capacity of businesses and associations is also of concern as their ability to book conferences, exhibitions or trade shows is currently uncertain. Across the Australian business events industry, event cancellations saw a near 100% loss of revenue, and staffing losses estimated at over 92,000 by the end of June 2020. The national business events industry is estimated to lose \$35.7 billion in value for the year ending June 2021.⁴

Where to from here?

Emerging Industry Developments

The sector's prospects and areas of opportunity

Most gathering limits have been removed, except for the observance of the 2 sqm social distancing rule and large venues such as Optus Stadium, HBF Park and RAC Arena operating at 50 per cent capacity. West Australians have increasingly engaged in social interactions, and some events having resumed in physical form.

Western Australia is a safe events destination

There is confidence that if high levels of ongoing testing and contact tracing continue, as well as the promise of a vaccine, some travel to Western Australia will return in 2021. Western Australia is one of the safest places globally at present given the low rate of local COVID-19 transmission. This status is contributing to Western Australia's desirability as an event destination and it has become important to maintain high levels of destination-awareness for future events when international travel resumes.

Hygiene and infection control

Managing mandatory contact registers for the purposes of COVID-19 contact tracing in Western Australian event and function venues supports the level of trust in the community. There are certain implications for staff training in relation to matters of customer privacy and secure record keeping as well as technological aspects if using QR codes when patrons, performers, staff and volunteers arrive at an event.

What will it take for recovery and future growth?

Workforce Drivers – Essential skills required to work in the Accommodation sector

Health and safety

From a governance, financial, and safety perspective, the events sector is considered high-risk. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has elevated the importance of managing delegate and employee health and safety.⁵

Project management and communication

The demand for rescheduling events has elevated the requirement for sophisticated business management and financial acumen, coupled with knowledge of legal responsibilities and rights as well as high-level negotiation skills to manage complex arrangements within uncertain circumstances.

Digital skills

Technical digital skills are essential in the events sector, particularly when coordinating online events. This

includes management of; delegate engagement, varying internet connectivity, smooth transitions between guest speakers, and 'housekeeping' matters.

How will the Events sector get there?

Employment initiatives and Industrial Relations updates

Regional Events funding

Tourism Western Australia continues to fund the Regional Events Scheme and Regional Events Program. The Regional Events Scheme assists with the development of events as tourist attractions within regional Western Australia. Seventy-seven events received funding as part of the 2020-21 Regional Events Scheme, with seven of the events supported through the Regional Aboriginal Events Scheme, all proceeding between 1 July 2020 and 31 December 2021.

Professional development for business events

Business Events Perth, formerly the Perth Convention Bureau, convenes the Aspire Scholarships and Professional Development Awards to support local conference conveners advance their professional development while also building a network of expert conveners in Western Australia. The program assists an individual's personal and professional development through attendance at a relevant national or international conference.⁶

Skills and Training Options

Infection Control and hygiene training for reopening

Events are routinely held within hospitality venues, and it is expected that all events workers will be required to have successfully completed the AHA (WA) Hospitality and Tourism COVID-19 Hygiene training course.

Jobs and Skills WA - Skills Ready half price courses⁷

The lengthy recovery for some events organisations, and associated diminished capacity to employ staff may suggest a potential oversupply of new events graduates in the short term. However, elevated consumer demand for events in Western Australia, which will intensify in the lead up to the return of a comprehensive events calendar, indicates an increased requirement for knowledgeable event coordinators and skilled events staff residing in the state. The Certificate III in Events is included in the Skills Ready package as a half-price course.

We would like to hear from you

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

Tracey Farrow | Industry Development Manager: Event Management

tfarrow@futurenow.org.au | 0497 799 990

References

1. Perth Convention Bureau; *Annual Report 2019*; accessed 16 July 2020.
2. Perth Festival; *2020 Impact Report*; <https://www.perthfestival.com.au/news/2020-impact-report/>
3. <https://www.ato.gov.au/general/jobkeeper-payment/employees/eligible-employees/>
4. Business Events Council of Australia; News article; Business Events Recovery Framework calls for JobKeeper extension to keep the industry alive; 19 June 2020; accessed 23 June 2020.
5. FutureNow industry consultation conducted during April – June 2020
6. Perth Convention Bureau; *Annual Report 2019*; accessed 16 July 2020.
7. Jobs & Skills WA, Skills Ready Boost your skills for the future, Hospitality, Retail, Tourism and Events, <https://www.jobsandskills.wa.gov.au/hospitality-retail-tourism-and-events>