

The Importance of Bringing International Conferences to Canada

A Briefing for Federal Government Partners

The Power of Conferences

In-person conferences drive economies and innovation.

Economically speaking, direct spending by delegates attending a 3,000-person conference in Canada represents approximately \$4 million in direct spending for hotels, food, retail, etc.¹ – making international conferences a highly valued and competitive market.

However, international conferences are also known to bring tangible “beyond tourism benefits”²:

- Showcasing advanced industry, creative, and academic sector expertise to a global audience.
- Acting as a catalyst for new R&D partnerships, trade, and investment.
- Driving sector collaboration and innovation across industry, academia, and NGOs.
- Attracting international talent and growing high value jobs.

A Strategy to Increase Canada’s Market Share of International Conferences

The [Destination Canada’s Business Events](#) (DCBE) team promotes our destinations internationally as innovation hubs, identifies conference bidding opportunities for cities, and finances site visits where appropriate.

Destination Canada does not participate in the bidding processes for conferences themselves; but connects all the stakeholders necessary for a successful bid under a national brand.

Through its Economic Sector Strategy, the DCBE team is focused on attracting international conferences from priority economic sectors in which Canada excels – Technology, Life Sciences, Natural Resources, Advanced Manufacturing, Agri-business, and Finance & Insurance.

Competitive Advantage: National Government Support

Canadian destinations operate in a competitive market for attracting international conferences.

Canada is also not the only country utilizing a sector strategy for attracting international conferences, and it lacks a competitive advantage in terms of national government support.

The British Government, for example, has long offered robust funding opportunities to support congress bidding on the international level³. And as it relates to national governments strongly supporting their business events sectors, the UK model is but one example of many.

While there have been some notable success stories of Canadian government departments supporting the effort of bringing international conferences to Canada (e.g., Department of Fisheries and Oceans – IMPAC5, September 2022), increased participation across government would give our destinations a significant competitive advantage and ultimately increase the likelihood of more of them coming to Canada.



Success Story: [International Marine Protected Areas Conference 2022](#) in Vancouver

- \$12M in dedicated government funds for IMPAC5.
- Secretariat created within DFO to plan the conference.
- Alignment with government’s conservation priorities.

¹ Source: *Destination Canada Estimate, 2018 Statistics Canada, Visitor Travel Survey*

² Business Events Legacies: JMIC Case Study Project Report ([link](#)).

³ The “[Business Events Growth Programme](#)” supports the attraction of international business events (Visit Britain).

Pursuing World-Renowned “Unicorn Events”

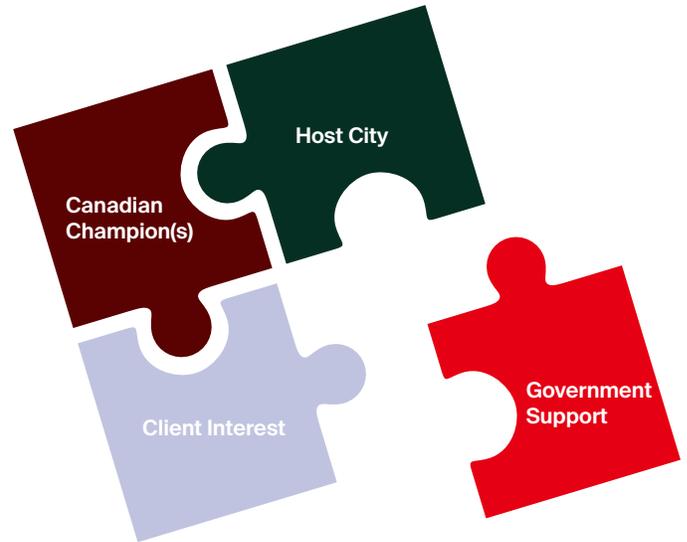
A “unicorn event” – a term coined by Destination Canada – belongs to a class of large-scale conferences that have achieved a world-renowned status and produce well-documented economic and social benefits for host countries.

More broadly, to qualify as a unicorn event an international conference must seek to achieve meaningful, long-term outcomes aligned with at least one of the 17 [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#).

Such unicorn events, which rotate host countries on an annual or multi-year basis (like the Olympics), have long been on our major destinations’ target lists but require significant funding and/or strong leadership from our federal government – both barriers to winning the right to host these conferences.

These highly sought-after events, if they are hosted in future years in Canada, can be tremendous catalysts for stimulating economic recovery⁴ – especially in downtown cores.

The Unicorn Event “Check-list” for Government



Among the four puzzle pieces required to win the right to host unicorn events, government support is often the missing piece.

There are various ways that the federal government can participate in the internationally competitive and long-term process of attracting world-renowned conferences to Canada:

1. **Establish a departmental liaison at each Deputy Ministers’ Office to receive unicorn event opportunities identified by Destination Canada.**
2. **Sending Ministerial/Departmental delegation to attend the next edition of the conference.**
3. **Providing a letter or video message from the responsible Minister in support of a bid.**
4. **Providing financial incentives for client organizations to choose Canada.**
5. **Provide dedicated staff to support the conference, if needed (e.g., Secretariat, FTEs, a government representative on Canadian host committee, etc.).**
6. **Participate in recognizing the efforts of National Conference Ambassadors⁵ (e.g., Certificate, photo op).**

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



⁴ The Joint Meetings Industry Council Global Manifesto: An Industry Rationale for the Use of Business Events as Primary Agents for Post-Pandemic Economic Recovery and Renewal ([link](#)).

⁵ A person of knowledge and stature, influential in their field, who has helped to bring an international conference in their sector of expertise to Canada.