



P R E S S R E L E A S E

New Forecast Signals Long Road to Recovery for Business Travel

Policy Steps Could Accelerate Rebound; Science-based Analysis Shows Safety of Restarting In-person Professional Meetings and Events

WASHINGTON (JUNE 15, 2021)—Lingering COVID restrictions and a patchwork approach to reopening across the country will prevent the economically crucial business travel segment from recovering until at least 2024, according to a Tourism Economics [analysis](#) released Tuesday by the U.S. Travel Association.

Travel overall is by far the U.S. industry hardest hit by the ongoing fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. Spending on travel for large, in-person **professional meetings and events** (PMEs) declined by [76% last year](#)—a \$97 billion loss in spending.

With vaccinations and infection rates in the U.S. trending favorably, restrictions lowered, and traveler confidence rebounding, domestic leisure travel is projected to reach 99% of its pre-pandemic peak in 2022 and to grow steadily thereafter.

But in the absence of clear and consistent guidance from federal health authorities on PMEs, business-related travel is not expected to recover its pre-pandemic volume for an additional two years. Only about a third (35%) of U.S. businesses are currently engaging in any business-related travel.

A staggering 65% of all U.S. jobs lost in 2020 were supported by travel, and they cannot fully recover without a swift return of all segments of travel, particularly in-person PMEs, according to the analysis.

One of the major factors in the slow return of PMEs is the uneven patchwork of guidance that currently governs large gatherings from jurisdiction to jurisdiction nationwide. U.S. Travel is urging the adoption of federal guidance that is clear and consistent—and that recognizes that health and safety measures can be more readily implemented at PMEs than at other forms of large gatherings.

Leading health care scientists at The Ohio State University today also released a white paper that includes evidence-based analysis—focused on a scientific review of proven health and safety measures substantiated over the last year—showing that it is safe to return to conducting and attending PMEs.

In [*The Scientific-Based Evidence for Conducting Safe and Healthy Professional Meetings and Events \(PMEs\)*](#), the authors rely on science and guidance from trusted sources, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Network to outline the best practices to ensure a safe return to large-scale, in-person PMEs. The paper also differentiates PMEs from other large gatherings, noting that PMEs offer a controlled environment that allows for scientifically proven safety measures.

“Getting back to our pre-pandemic ways of doing business must include taking evidence-based tactics we learned during the pandemic to keep people safe and healthy,” said study co-author Bernadette Melnyk, PhD, APRN-CNP, FAANP, FNAP, FAAN, Vice President for Health Promotion, University Chief Wellness Officer and Dean of the College of Nursing at The Ohio State University. “We must continue to follow the best evolving science as we make plans to hold in-person events again.”

Polling indicates that 85% of American workers view in-person events as “irreplaceable,” and 81% who attended work-related PMEs before the pandemic **miss doing so** and are likely to attend such events in the future.

Said U.S. Travel President and CEO Roger Dow: “A thriving travel industry—and the broader U.S. economy—are dependent on the return of business travel and PMEs. Americans are eager to reconnect with colleagues in person, via business meetings, conferences and conventions, and these scientific analysis and recommendations make clear it is possible and safe to do so.”

Dow continued, “A consistent approach to reopening PMEs, including guidance from the CDC that differentiates PMEs from other large gatherings, is critical to infusing confidence and optimism into this key sector of our economy.”

To support the return of professional meetings and events, a coalition of travel industry businesses and organizations, under the U.S. Travel Association umbrella, is also launching an **initiative** called “Let’s Meet There” to advance the full and safe reopening of the business travel sector. “Let’s Meet There” will be detailed at a press event in Las Vegas on June 16.

“As more American adults are vaccinated and pent-up demand for travel is released, it’s more important than ever that businesses and local, state and federal governments recognize the role meetings and events will play in our ability to make a full economic recovery,” said Chris Nassetta, president and CEO of Hilton. “By following CDC guidance and implementing common-sense safety measures, we’re hosting professional meetings and events in our hotels across the country and are confident that these important gatherings can happen safely once again.”

View the U.S. Travel Association forecast **here**.

Read The Ohio State University’s white paper **here**.

Media interested in interviewing the authors of the paper should contact **Phil Saken** (614.688.3326); to speak with a representative from U.S. Travel please contact **Chris Kennedy** (202.465.6635).

*U.S. Travel Association is the national, non-profit organization representing all components of the travel industry. In 2020, travel generated \$1.5 trillion in economic output and supported 11 million jobs, a drastic decline from pre-pandemic figures. U.S. Travel’s mission is to increase travel to and within the United States. Visit **ustravel.org** for information and recovery-related data.*