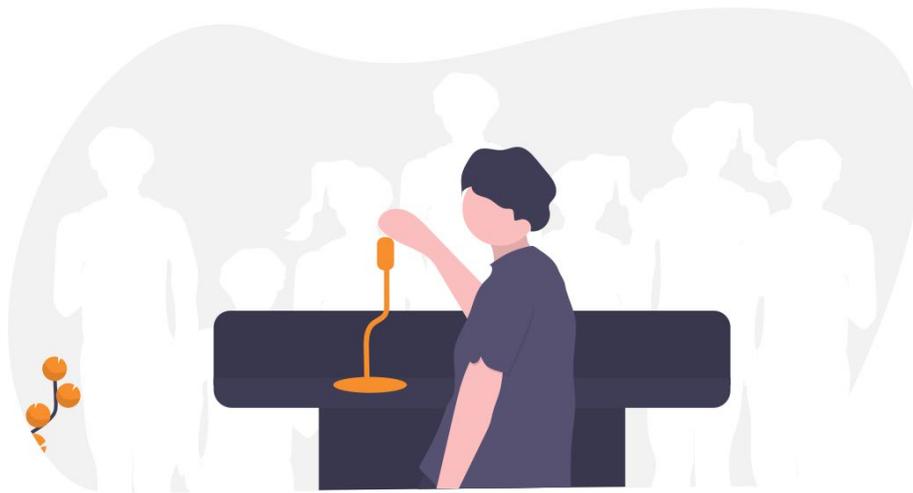


# TPG Pulse For Associations

In Partnership with The Canadian Society of Association Executives

VOLUME 4, JUNE 8, 2020

## Rethinking Events in the Wake of COVID 19



By Geoffrey Thacker  
The Portage Group

"[We are] determining how to offer hybrid or virtual events but [there is a] challenge with offering 2-3 day trade show virtually and getting commitments from exhibitors and attendees to participate in [a] new type of event in short timeframe. [The] alternative though is [a] big financial loss."

***Provincial Trade Association CEO***

The TPG Pulse for Associations is a publication series focused on providing information, insight and tracking of the impact of COVID 19 on the association sector.

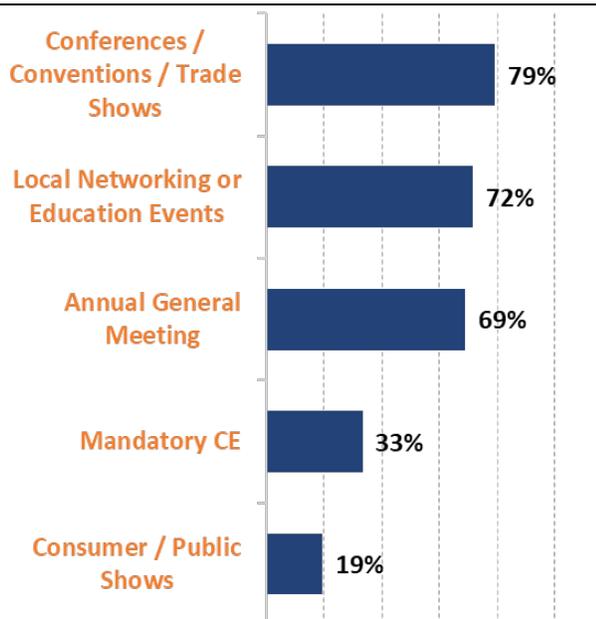
This edition of the Pulse highlights the key findings from our inaugural impact survey, which was completed by 372 Canadian associations and other nonprofits between April 29 and May 8, 2020.

This Pulse has been developed in partnership with The Canadian Society of Association Executives.

# COVID 19 Impact on Canadian Association Events

When the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic as result of COVID 19 in March 2020, the impact on events involving public gatherings was immediate and significant. When government restrictions were implemented, 97% associations and non-profits who participated in the survey had at least one in-person event scheduled between March 2020 and November 2020. The vast majority of these events have been affected by COVID 19.

## Holding At Least One Event March to November 2020



Note: N=370

Major events such as conferences, conventions and trade shows were the most common with eight in ten

(79%) participants indicating they had such an event planned, followed by local networking or education events (72%), and annual general meetings (72%).

For all event types, fewer organizations had events planned for summer (June to August) than spring (March to May) or fall (September to November).

On average, participating organizations had at least 4.3 events scheduled between March and November<sup>1</sup>.

Like many event organizers, Canadian Associations have had to reschedule, adapt and/or cancel their scheduled in-person events due to COVID 19 restrictions. As of May 8, 2020, only 7% of events scheduled from March to November were still scheduled (or had taken place) without any changes. Moreover, one quarter (24%) of events had been cancelled outright while a further third (34%) had been moved to a virtual format. From a venue standpoint, an event that switches to virtual is still a cancellation and therefore may be subject to penalties and cancellation terms. In total, venue cancellations have occurred for 58% of planned in-person events from March to November.

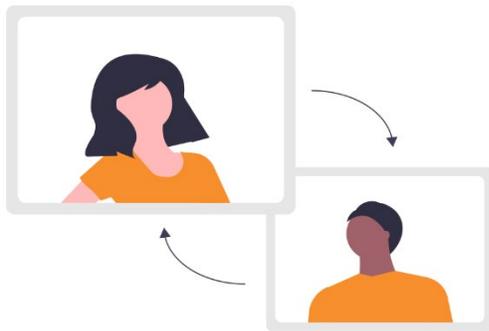
Consumer / public shows were by far the most likely event type to have been cancelled outright. Over half (55%) of scheduled events of this type up to November 2020 had suffered this fate. The next most likely to be cancelled was conferences, conventions and trade shows at 33% followed by local networking and education events at 26%.

"[We are] not spending any energy on rescheduling a conference until a vaccine is available."

**National Trade Association CEO**

<sup>1</sup> The survey asked which time periods respondents had events in and not the number of events in each time period. Accordingly, the actual average number of events will be higher than 4.3.

In contrast, AGMs were much more likely than other events to have been moved online. Six in ten (60%) AGMs between March and November were moved to a virtual format. The same holds true for 43% of mandatory continuing education events and 32% of local networking or education events.



Not surprisingly, the status of events varies considerably based on when the event was to have taken place. At the time of the survey, the original planned dates for most of the March to May events (not shown) would have already passed. A significant majority (65% to 74% depending on type) of these events had been cancelled or moved online while a further 22% to 31% (depending on event type) had been postponed.

On the other hand, looking to the fall (September to November), 11% to 20% of events remained

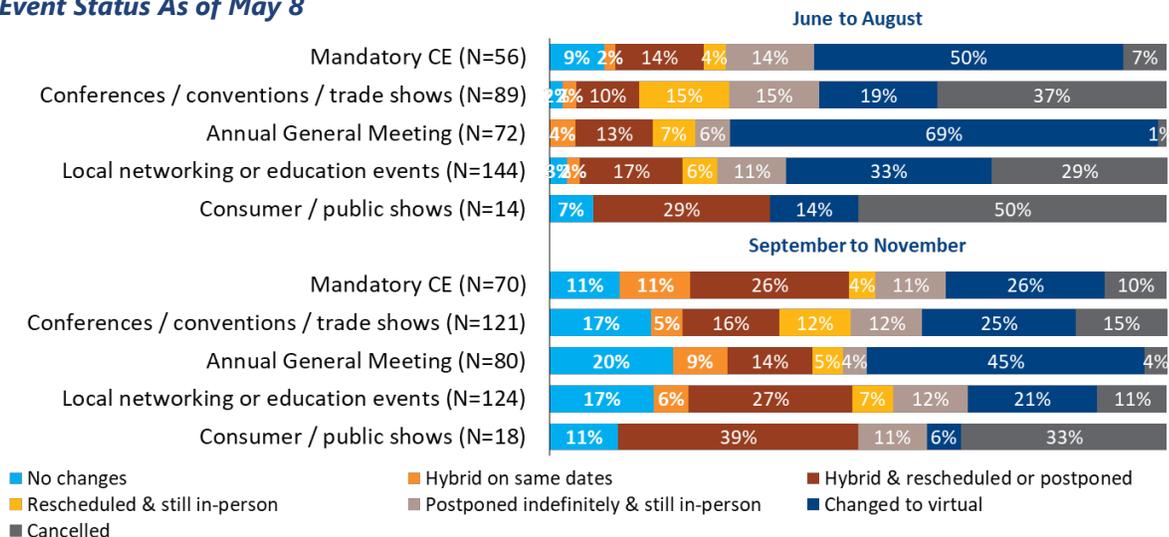
scheduled as planned while 32% to 49% had already been cancelled or moved to online. Notably, a significant portion of events in the summer (12% to 29%) and fall (21% to 39%) have changed to a hybrid event (combined in-person and virtual) with the same dates or rescheduled. In other words, a significant portion of event planners have accepted that they may have challenges drawing people to an in-person event in 2020 and/or that they may be forced to cancel the in-person portion all together and are laying the groundwork now for that transition.

As noted above, how event changes are handled varies by event type:

**Mandatory Continuing Education (CE)** is one of the two least likely event types to have been cancelled outright. Half (50%) of mandatory CE in June to August has already been moved online while 16% is now setup in a hybrid format. For the fall (September to November), over one third (37%) have been moved to a hybrid format while only 26% has already been moved exclusively to an online format.

**Conference, Conventions and Trade Shows** occurring in the summer have largely had their fate determined with just over one third (37%) being cancelled, 19% moved online and 30% postponed and/or rescheduled, but still in-person. Looking

### Event Status As of May 8



toward the fall, only 15% have been cancelled and 25% moved online. Just over one in five (22%) still have the event planned with 5% opting to make it a hybrid event.

**Annual General Meetings** are the least likely to have been cancelled (1% in summer and 4% in fall) and are the most likely to have been moved online (69% in summer and 45% in fall). At 20%, they are also the most likely to still be scheduled without change for the fall.

One third (33%) of **Local Networking or Education Events** for the summer have already been moved online while a further 29% were cancelled and 34% have been postponed. Half of the postponements for summer (17% of events) are now planned as a hybrid event. Looking ahead to the fall, one third (33%) of local networking or education events are now slated as hybrid events that can be pivoted to virtual quickly. Only 11% of fall events have been cancelled while one in five (21%) have been switched to virtual.

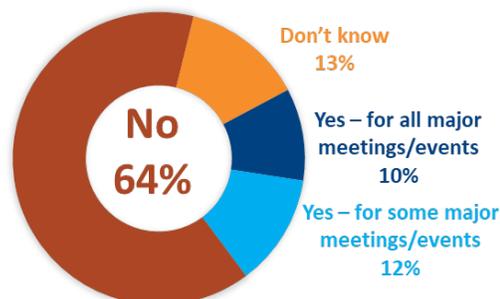
**Consumer and Public Shows** are the most likely to have been cancelled outright or to have been shifted to hybrid and postponed. Results for this event category should be interpreted with caution due to the small number of events captured in the survey.

## Event Cancellation Insurance

Further compounding the financial challenges facing Canadian associations as a result of COVID 19 is that almost two-thirds (64%) of those surveyed do not carry event cancellation insurance for any event while another 10% carry insurance only for major meetings and events. As such, these associations may face penalties on various event contracts – not to mention the loss in revenue and the costs incurred relating to staff time in planning, marketing, and any expenses

that were not contracted, as well as the cost, for some, of pivoting to a virtual platform.

### Have Event Cancellation Insurance



Note: N=372

For those event contracts with a force majeure clause, COVID 19 may trigger the clause if the venue is unable to meet its commitment or “if the clause expressly includes a pandemic or communicable disease”, which may help to alleviate some of the financial penalties of event cancellations for some associations.

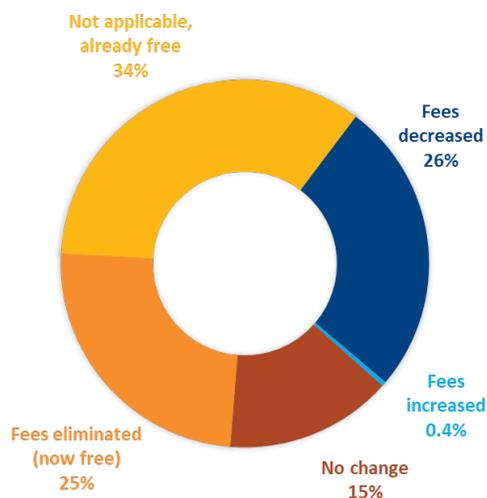
If communicable disease is not covered within the force majeure clause, even those associations with event insurance may be unable to make a claim. Among those who have event insurance, only 11% indicated that their policy covered communicable disease. Three in ten (31%) indicated that their policy did not include communicable disease while 58% did not know.

## Changes in Registration Fees When Moving to Virtual Delivery

There is much debate in the sector about whether or not registration fees should be reduced for moving events online. There is a perception that it costs less

to deliver events virtually. In some regards this is true. Virtual events do not require food (though you can organize timed delivery via Uber Eats or Skip the Dishes), facility rental or travel for staff. However, other costs do not disappear. Plus, for any significant event there are costs associated with the online platform to deliver the event.

### Changes to Fees Due to Moving to Virtual



Notes: Base is those who moved events to virtual delivery. N=224

For those associations who have moved to virtual events, one quarter (26%) indicated that they had decreased registration fees. The survey did not ask respondents to indicate the size of the decrease or whether it reflected a decrease in the cost to deliver. A further quarter (25%) eliminated fees all together. When accounting for the fact that one third (34%) of events moved to virtual were already free, those who reduced or eliminated fees account for three quarters (77%) of events that were not free.



## Supporting Associations Retooling to Thrive

Through the coming weeks and months, TPG and CSAE will be collecting data, and providing information, insight and guidance where we can. We'll do this by publishing a series of free resources that track the impact of COVID-19 on the association sector and that delve into how associations are adapting, retooling, and refocusing not just to survive, but hopefully to thrive, in our new reality. You can find other recent resources and information on upcoming initiatives [here](#).

For more information please contact [research@portagegroup.com](mailto:research@portagegroup.com) or [info@csae.com](mailto:info@csae.com).

### About The Portage Group Inc.

The Portage Group is a full-service consulting firm serving the association sector. TPG is the official research partner for the Canadian Society of Association Executives.

Toronto - Ottawa – Victoria

[www.portagegroup.com](http://www.portagegroup.com)

1-866-920-3999

[contact@portagegroup.com](mailto:contact@portagegroup.com)

[Twitter](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [Facebook](#)

### About Canadian Society of Association Executives

CSAE is Canada's only member-based not-for-profit organization committed to delivering the knowledge, resources and environment to advance association excellence.

[www.csae.com](http://www.csae.com) | [info@csae.com](mailto:info@csae.com)

[Twitter](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [Facebook](#)

© The Portage Group, 2020.