



THE SLEEP WELL SERIES

White Paper No. 1

Designed to Connect

Why attendee engagement keeps meeting leaders up at night, and how to turn it into measurable value.

INTRODUCTION

We asked what keeps you up at night. You told us.

The agenda is set, the venue is booked and the speakers are confirmed. Yet the night before a meeting, many leaders are still awake, wondering if it will land.

So we asked. Between March and August 2026, AMI surveyed business leaders across industries. Our question was simple: what keeps you up at night before a meeting? The answer was clear. Attendee engagement and experience came out on top, ahead of ROI, budget, logistics and technology.¹

In this paper, we share what they told us and what the research confirms. Then we turn it into five practical ways to design for engagement, and show how that engagement drives business results.

AMI SLEEP WELL SURVEY

#1 concern

Attendee engagement and experience, named more than any other concern by the leaders we surveyed¹

INDUSTRY RESEARCH

63%

of planners name attendee engagement as their primary success metric²

INDUSTRY RESEARCH

78% vs 40%

of organizers think attendees had a peak moment, vs. attendees who say they did⁴

Five ways to design for engagement

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- 1 **Design around what attendees came for**
- 2 **Program connection, don't leave it to chance**
- 3 **Make participation hands-on and two-way**
- 4 **Design the whole journey, early**
- 5 **Measure what attendees valued**

*Thank you to everyone who took part. We hope this helps you sleep a little better. **The AMI team***

What keeps leaders up at night before a meeting

Between March and August 2026, AMI surveyed business leaders across pharma and life sciences, healthcare, financial and professional services, and travel and hospitality. Here is what they told us.¹

23%

of all responses named attendee engagement and experience, the #1 concern

Attendee engagement & experience



Share of all responses. Respondents could choose up to three concerns.

19%

named demonstrating ROI, the #2 concern

45%

would most value support with data and ROI measurement

62%

expect AI and automation to have the biggest impact on their role

" We need to story tell better.

Survey respondent

OUR PERSPECTIVE

Engagement and ROI are two sides of the same worry. Leaders want proof that a meeting changed something. That proof starts with designing for engagement, then measuring it.

The industry research agrees

Three recent studies, covering more than 4,700 planners, organizers and attendees, point the same way.

CVENT

2026 Global Planner Sourcing Report

1,650 planners

63%

of planners name attendee engagement as their primary success metric. In 2025, the top measure was total cost.²

FREEMAN

Experience Trends Report, 2025

2,672 attendees and organizers

78% vs 40%

of organizers believe attendees had a peak moment, vs. attendees who say they did. Attendees come to connect (28%), learn (25%) and find solutions (25%).⁴

ENCORE AND BOLDPUSH

2026 Experience Design Report

447 event professionals

49% vs 8%

rank peer networking as the most important factor in event success, vs. those who dedicate more programming to structured connection.³

OUR PERSPECTIVE

The research confirms what our survey found. Engagement is now how events are judged, yet most agendas still leave it to chance. In our experience, it has to be designed in, session by session, and measured like any other business result.

Five ways to design for engagement

Practical steps you can take into your next meeting. Each one starts with the evidence, then gives you actions to try.

01

Design around what attendees came for

02

Program connection, don't leave it to chance

03

Make participation hands-on and two-way

04

Design the whole journey, early

05

Measure what attendees valued

01

Design around what attendees came for

#1

concern among the business leaders we surveyed: attendee engagement¹

Attendees judge an event by whether they learned, connected and found solutions.⁴ Set those outcomes first, then choose formats and technology to deliver them.

TRY THIS

- ☐ For every session, name what attendees should learn, who they should meet and what they should leave able to do
- ☐ Use registration answers, interests and app activity to recommend sessions, people and exhibitors
- ☐ Brief speakers on the outcome, not just the topic

02

Program connection, don't leave it to chance

8%

of planners dedicate more programming to structured connection³

Half of planners say networking matters most, yet few build it into the agenda.³ Give connection a real place on the agenda.

TRY THIS

- ☐ Host roundtables by role, challenge or industry, a format that leads attendee satisfaction³
- ☐ Use an event app with profiles, messaging and meeting requests so introductions start before arrival³
- ☐ Rotate tables and give each round a discussion topic, a format attendees named as a peak moment⁴

03

Make participation hands-on and two-way

61%

of attendees say an immersive experience means hands-on interaction, not staging⁴

Attendees feel engaged when they take part, not when they watch.⁴ Roundtables and hands-on workshops lead satisfaction.³

TRY THIS

- ☐ Swap long single-speaker blocks for shorter, multi-voice, interactive sessions³
- ☐ Build in workshops, small-group problem solving and demos people can try
- ☐ Open with a poll and keep live Q&A in the run of show

04

Design the whole journey, early

21%

of planners bring production partners in at the concept stage³

The experience starts with the first email and the walk from the door, not the first session.

TRY THIS

- ☐ Involve AV and production at the concept stage, when they can still shape the format
- ☐ Make wayfinding effortless; a third of attendees name it their biggest source of friction⁴
- ☐ Plan registration, check-in and pre-event communication as part of the experience

05

Measure what attendees valued

45%

of the leaders we surveyed want more support with data and ROI measurement¹

Proving ROI was the #2 concern among the leaders we surveyed.¹ Measure the countable results and the human value with equal weight.⁵

TRY THIS

- ☐ Agree on who the event is for, what it should achieve and how you'll measure it before planning starts
- ☐ Track participation: attendance, poll and Q&A response, app activity and connections made
- ☐ Capture what people learned, who they met and whether they would return. 85% of attendees who had a peak moment are more likely to come back⁴

→ **Next: AMI in practice.** See how we apply these principles in life sciences.

How we apply these principles in life sciences

Life sciences meetings carry extra weight. Time with healthcare professionals is limited, and every program has to meet compliance standards. Here is how the five principles shape our work.

EXAMPLE 1 | SPEAKER TRAINING

Training physician speakers at scale

A life sciences client needed to prepare a large group of physician speakers in a short window, without losing quality or compliance.

HOW WE APPLIED THE PRINCIPLES

- 1 Built every session around what speakers must be able to do after training, not just the content to cover
- 4 Managed the full journey, from invitation and registration to travel, check-in and follow-up
- 5 Tracked attendance and completion for every physician, with compliance records ready for the client

THE RESULT

1,040 physicians trained in four weeks

EXAMPLE 2 | ADVISORY BOARDS

Hearing every voice in the room

Advisory boards only deliver value when every expert contributes. Quieter participants often hold the most useful insights.

HOW WE APPLIED THE PRINCIPLES

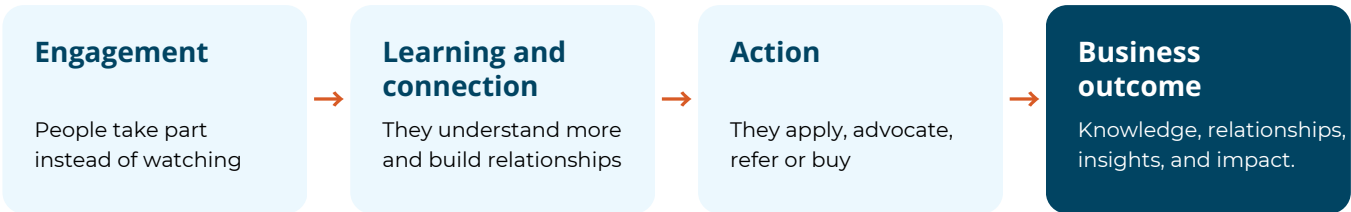
- 2 Small-group roundtables and facilitated discussion, so every advisor has time to speak
- 3 Live polling to capture each advisor's view, including those who say less in open discussion
- 5 HCP attendance and compliance records captured in Veeva, with insights summarized for the brand team

THE VALUE

Insights the brand team can act on, with a compliant record of the meeting

Engagement is how meetings deliver results

Engagement is not the goal on its own. It is how a meeting delivers on its business objective. When people take part, they learn, connect and act. That is what moves the numbers our clients care about.



Match the engagement strategy to the objective

Meeting objective	Engagement strategy	How to show value
Launch a product or therapy	Hands-on demos and roundtables by specialty	Knowledge checks, follow-up meetings requested
Train speakers or field teams	Interactive workshops and practice sessions	Completion rates, confidence scores, certification
Strengthen relationships	Structured networking and app meeting requests	Connections made, meetings booked, return intent
Gather expert insight	Live polling and facilitated discussion	Insights captured, actions taken by the brand team

Measure both sides of the return

PCMA's Return on Events framework gives equal weight to the countable results and the human value.⁵ Plan both before the meeting, not after.

What you can count

Attendance, poll and Q&A response, app activity, meetings booked, leads and pipeline

What attendees felt

Knowledge gained, relationships built, new ideas, likelihood to recommend or return

PUTTING IT TO WORK

45% of the leaders we surveyed want more support with data and ROI measurement.¹ AMI Meeting Intelligence turns engagement data into trends, format comparisons and benchmarks, so you can show what each meeting delivered.

Technology that serves the outcome

Technology doesn't create engagement on its own. It has the most impact when it is built into the experience design.³ And 62% of the leaders we surveyed expect AI and automation to have the biggest impact on their role.¹ We choose tools for what they help attendees and clients achieve.

BEFORE

Personal from the first click

Registration and pre-event messages set expectations and point each attendee to the right sessions and people.

Powered by **Cvent**

ARRIVAL

A smooth start, and a record of who came

Self-service check-in and session check-in remove friction and show who attended what.

Powered by **OnArrival**

DURING

Every voice in the room

Networking, live polling and Q&A work the same for the room and for remote attendees.

Powered by **EventMobi and Slido**

AFTER

Proof of what the meeting delivered

Participation data feeds AMI Meeting Intelligence. For life sciences, HCP attendance and compliance data can support client reporting and CRM processes, where integrated.

Powered by **AMI Meeting Intelligence and Veeva**

HOW IT COMES TOGETHER

Registration shows who is coming. Check-in confirms who showed up. App and polling activity show who took part. Together, they give you the data to prove the value of every meeting.

Engagement isn't accidental. We design it.

Engagement by design

Polling, live Q&A, roundtables, gamification and digital networking designed to drive participation, uncover challenges, generate insights and strengthen relationships.

High-touch delivery

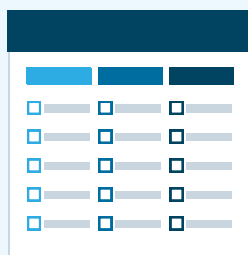
One accountable lead, attendee-first communications and onsite leadership that resolves issues in real time.

Production that serves the room

AV and staging designed for clarity, comfort and connection, in person, virtual or hybrid.

Meeting Intelligence

Engagement trends, session comparisons and portfolio benchmarking that turn meeting data into decisions.



FREE COMPANION RESOURCE

Put These Insights Into Practice

Download the complimentary AMI Engagement Measurement Checklist, a practical Before, During and After guide to help you plan stronger engagement, measure success and demonstrate business value.

[Download Your Checklist](#)

Let's design your next meeting to connect. Contact us at americanmeetings.com/contact-us

SOURCES

1. AMI Sleep Well Survey of business leaders, March to August 2026. Concern figures are shares of all responses; respondents could choose up to three.
2. Cvent, 2026 Global Planner Sourcing Report. 1,650 event planners in six regions, surveyed with Censuswide in July 2025. cvent.com/en/blog/events/venue-sourcing-trends
3. Encore and Boldpush, "Encore and Boldpush Release 2026 Experience Design Report," press release, May 6, 2026. 447 event professionals. encoreglobal.com/about/newsroom
4. Freeman, Freeman Experience Trends Report: Unpacking XLNC, Bringing the X Factor to Attendee Experiences, 2025. Experience Syndicated Survey, September 2025, 2,672 respondents. freeman.com/resources/freeman-experience-trends-report
5. PCMA with Fruition Co., Beyond ROI to ROE (Return on Events): Measuring the Impact of Business Events, December 2020. pcma.org

More papers in the Sleep Well Series will follow, shaped by what you told us.

