



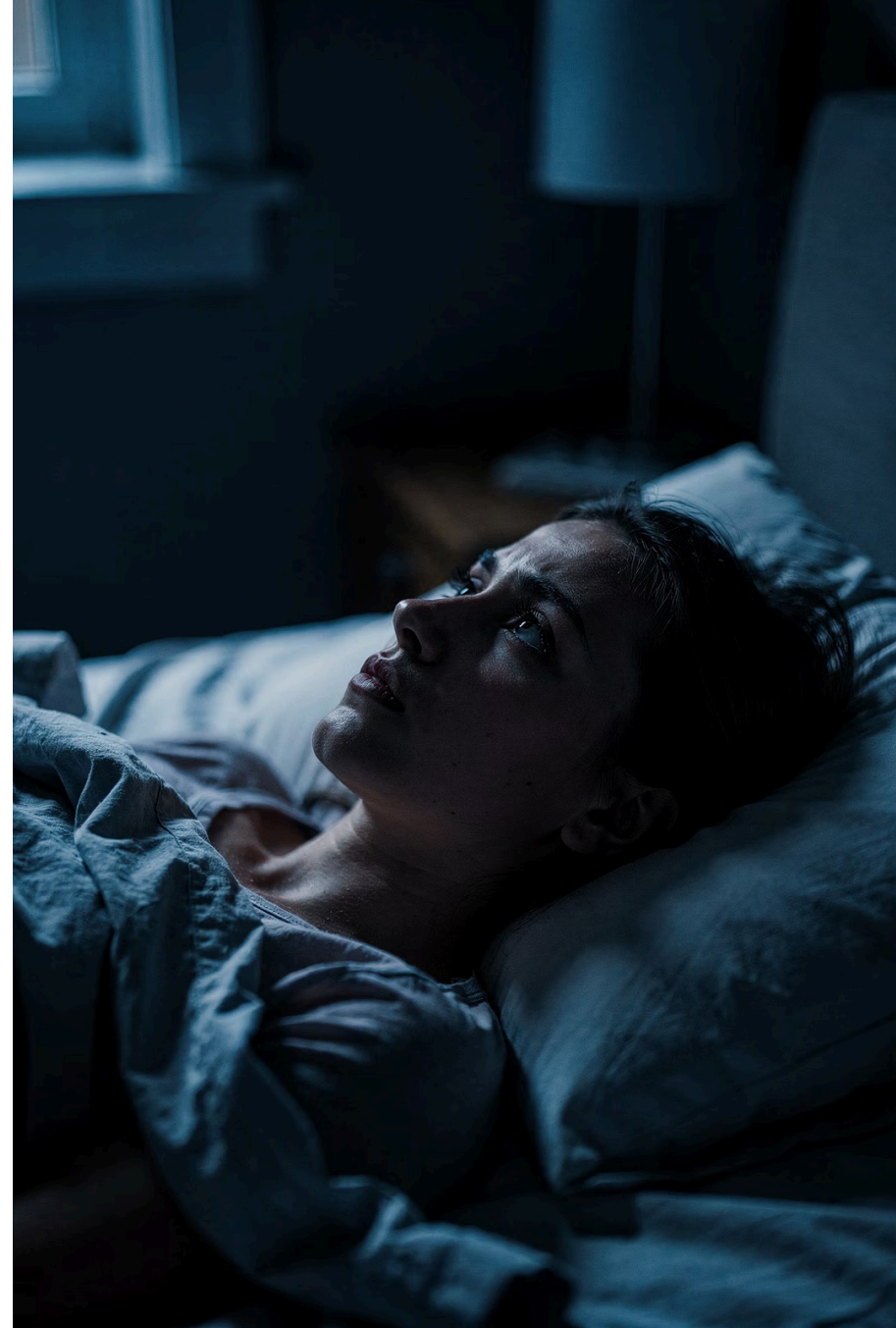
Planning Corporate Meetings in a High-Cost, High-Risk Environment

Managing Budget, Safety, and Site Selection in 2026

INTERACTIVE SESSION PRESENTED BY: DR CHRISTINE CLEAVER, NYU

Takeaway Resource: A Practical Resource Library for Smarter Destination Evaluation, Risk Assessment, and Strategic Meeting Planning in 2026

**"What is keeping you up
at night when planning
meetings in 2026?"**



Poll: Your Biggest Planning Challenge

What is your organization's biggest planning challenge right now?

 **Budget Pressure**

 **Safety Concerns**

Executive Approval

 **Attendance Uncertainty**

 **Travel Disruptions**

 **Vendor Costs**

Poll: Attendee Travel Hesitation

Have attendees expressed hesitation about traveling to certain destinations?

Frequently

A recurring pattern in our planning conversations

Occasionally

It comes up, but isn't the norm

Rarely

Only in exceptional circumstances

Never


Not a factor in our planning process

Poll: Who Influences Your Meeting Decisions?

Which department has the greatest influence on your meeting decisions?



EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP
TOP AUTHORITY ON KEY DECISIONS



PROCUREMENT
BUDGET CONTROL AND SOURCING



FINANCE
COST APPROVAL AND ANALYSIS



RISK MANAGEMENT
SAFETY AND LEGAL OVERSIGHT



HUMAN RESOURCES
EMPLOYEE WELFARE & RELATIONS



MEETINGS & EVENTS TEAM
OPERATIONAL EXECUTION & LOGISTICS

Today's planners are no longer simply event organizers. They are **strategic advisors** responsible for managing organizational risk, financial accountability, and attendee confidence.



The New Corporate Meetings Environment

The landscape for corporate meetings has fundamentally shifted. Planners now operate at the intersection of finance, risk, and strategy — navigating pressures that didn't exist a decade ago.



Major Forces: Financial Pressure



Inflation

Persistent inflation eroding purchasing power across all meeting categories



Rising Hotel Rates

Group room rates at historic highs in major meeting markets



Air Travel Costs

Increased airfare squeezing attendee travel budgets



Vendor Labor Costs

Staffing shortages driving up F&B, AV, and service costs



Technology Expenses

Hybrid and digital infrastructure adding new line items to every budget

Major Forces: Risk Pressure

Geopolitical Uncertainty

Shifting international relations affecting destination viability and traveler confidence

Public Health Concerns

Ongoing vigilance around health protocols and attendee wellness

Weather-Related Disruptions

Extreme weather events creating new contingency planning demands

Cybersecurity Threats

Data breaches and digital vulnerabilities at events on the rise

Reputational Risk

Destination choices increasingly scrutinized by media and stakeholders

Major Forces: Organizational Pressure

The Scrutiny Is Real

Every meeting decision now passes through multiple layers of organizational review before approval.

Key Pressures

- **Increased executive scrutiny** — leadership wants justification
- **Procurement involvement** — new approval layers and vendor requirements
- **ROI expectations** — measurable outcomes are non-negotiable
- **Duty of care responsibilities** — legal and ethical obligations to attendees

Answering the Hard Questions

Every stakeholder has a question. Planners need the right data sources to answer them confidently.

Question	Trusted Source
Can we afford it?	Tourism Economics, BLS, Federal Reserve
Will people attend?	GBTA, attendee surveys, registration data
Is it safe?	International SOS, State Department, CDC
What are competitors doing?	PCMA, MPI, industry networks
What risks are emerging?	NOAA, local news, WEF
How do we justify it?	ROI metrics, business objectives, stakeholder feedback



A Question for the Room

How many of you have had a destination recommendation **challenged by your CFO, procurement team, or senior leadership?**

You're not alone. This is now a standard part of the planning process — and being prepared to respond is a core professional skill.

"Risk is no longer a contingency plan. It has become a core decision-making variable."

Destination Evaluation Matrix

Challenge

The Scenario

- 500-person leadership summit
- Budget-sensitive environment
- Hybrid workforce
- Strong executive oversight

Research These Factors

Pick 3 Destinations

- Hotel costs & meeting space
- Airlift accessibility
- Weather considerations
- Attendee appeal & transportation
- Safety & labor concerns
- Infrastructure reliability



Evaluation Matrix: Four Lenses

Each table scores destinations across four critical lenses:



Financial Lens

Total cost, airfare, food & beverage, transportation



Risk Lens

Safety, weather, operational reliability



Attendee Experience

Accessibility, destination appeal, networking opportunities



Executive Lens

Brand alignment, ROI potential, stakeholder perception

Debrief: Present Your Case

Each table presents their findings to the room. Be prepared to defend your choices.

01

Name Your Top 3 Destinations

Which destinations did your table evaluate and why?

03

Identify the Biggest Tradeoff

What did you have to sacrifice to make this choice?

02

Reveal Your Selected Destination

Which destination scored highest across all four lenses?

04

Justify to Leadership

Make the case — why should the CFO approve this destination?

Five Corporate Decision Filters

The High-Cost/High-Risk Planning Model gives planners a structured lens for every major decision.

- 1 Financial Stewardship**
Can we justify the investment?
- 2 Duty of Care**
Can we reasonably protect attendees?
- 3 Business Impact**
Does the destination support organizational goals?
- 4 Attendee Experience**
Will people want to attend?
- 5 Organizational Reputation**
How will stakeholders perceive the decision?



Executive Communication Exercise

⚠️ **The CFO asks:** "Why are we spending more money to meet in XXX when another city appears cheaper?"

Work with your table to craft a **60-second executive response**. Your answer must address value, outcomes, and risk — not just cost. Be concise, confident, and data-informed.

Response Debrief

Share your 60-second responses with the room. As you listen, consider:



What language resonated most with leadership?



Which data points were most persuasive?



How did teams frame value vs. cost?

Leadership rarely approves meetings based solely on cost. They approve them based on **value, outcomes, and risk management.**

CRISIS CHALLENGE

Crisis & Executive Response Challenge

Each table receives one real-world crisis scenario to navigate:

 **Hurricane Forecast**

 **Labor Strike**

 **International Travel Advisory**

 **Public Health Concern**

 **Cybersecurity Incident**

 **Significant Budget Reduction**

 **Major Speaker Cancellation**

Table Assignment: Crisis Response Framework

Teams must work through each dimension of their crisis scenario:

1	Risk Assessment What is the actual level of risk?
2	Financial Impact What costs are affected?
3	Attendee Impact Will attendance decline?
4	Executive Communication How do you explain the situation to leadership?
5	Recommended Action Proceed, modify, relocate, postpone, or cancel?

Risk Scoring Worksheet

Groups assign scores across five dimensions to determine the appropriate response level.

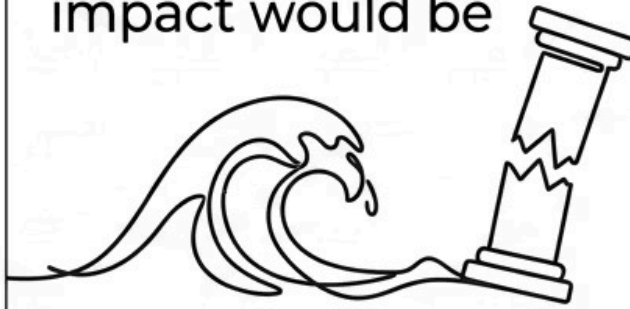
Likelihood

probability of the event occurring



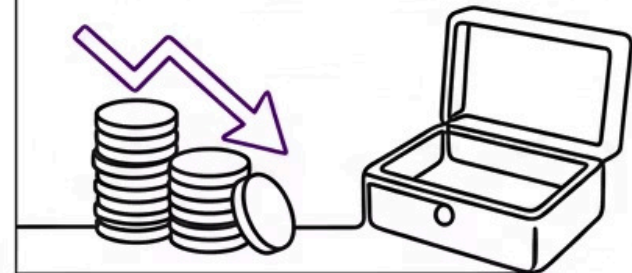
Severity

how serious the impact would be



Financial Impact

cost exposure to the organization



Attendee Impact

effect on attendance and experience



Reputational Impact

how it affects organizational standing



Procurement, Finance & Leadership Discussion

A facilitated conversation exploring how cross-functional relationships shape modern meeting planning — and how planners can build stronger partnerships across the organization.



Let's Chat: Discussion Questions

- **How has procurement changed your planning process?**
- **What financial metrics matter most to your organization?**
- **How do you demonstrate ROI when conditions are uncertain?**
- **How do you respond to attendee hesitation about travel?**
- **What data helps secure executive approval?**

Key Themes from the Discussion



Cross-Functional Collaboration

Breaking silos between meetings, finance, procurement, and risk



Data-Driven Decision-Making

Grounding every recommendation in credible, current data



Strategic Communication

Translating planning complexity into executive-ready language



Building Stakeholder Trust

Earning confidence through transparency and accountability



Long-Term Resilience

Designing planning processes that adapt to ongoing uncertainty

Complete the Sentence

"The most successful corporate meeting planners in the next five years will be the ones who..."



The Future Belongs to Strategic Planners

✓ Balance Cost and Value

✓ Communicate with Leadership

✓ Collaborate Across Functions

✓ Build Attendee Confidence

✓ Decide Under Uncertainty

The planners who thrive won't necessarily have the biggest budgets or the most resources. They'll be the professionals who can **confidently make decisions when the answers aren't obvious** and help their organizations move forward despite uncertainty.

Takeaway Toolkit

Scan the QR code to access your complete resource library — including the Destination Evaluation Matrix, Risk Scoring Worksheet, and Executive Communication guides.

- ✔ Your practical toolkit for smarter destination evaluation, risk assessment, and strategic meeting planning in 2026.



Destination Evaluation Matrix

Rate each destination on a scale of 1–5 for each factor. 5 = Excellent / Very Favorable, 4 = Good, 3 = Acceptable, 2 = Concerning, 1 = Significant Concern. Multiply the rating by the weight to calculate the weighted score.

Destination A:

Destination B:

Destination C:

Criteria	Weight	Destination A	Weighted Score	Destination B	Weighted Score	Destination C	Weighted Score
FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP							
Hotel Room Rates	10						
Airfare Accessibility & Cost	10						
Food & Beverage Costs	5						
Ground Transportation Costs	5						
Potential Hidden Costs	5						
Subtotal	35						
RISK & DUTY OF CARE							
Safety & Security Environment	10						
Weather/Climate Risk	5						
Public Health Considerations	5						
Labor Disruption Potential	5						
Political/Social Stability	5						
Subtotal	30						
ATTENDEE EXPERIENCE							
Destination Appeal	5						
Ease of Travel	5						
Dining &	3						

Entertainment Options							
Networking Environment	2						
Accessibility & Inclusion	5						
Subtotal	20						
STRATEGIC BUSINESS VALUE							
Alignment with Meeting Objectives	5						
Executive Perception	3						
Brand/Reputation Impact	2						
Procurement & Finance Approval Potential	5						
Subtotal	15						
TOTAL SCORE	100						

Executive Discussion Questions

Which destination received the highest score?

Would your CFO choose the same destination?

Which destination presents the greatest risk?

What trade-offs would you be willing to make?

What factors influenced your decision most heavily?

If attendee safety became a larger concern tomorrow, would your recommendation change?

If your budget was reduced by 15%, would your recommendation change?

How would you justify your recommendation to senior leadership in one sentence?

Final Recommendation

Recommended Destination: _____

Top Three Reasons:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Biggest Risk Concern: _____

How We Will Mitigate This Risk: _____

30-Second Executive Recommendation:

"We recommend _____ because it provides the strongest balance of financial stewardship, attendee experience, organizational objectives, and risk management."

Risk Scoring Worksheet

Planning Corporate Meetings in a High-Cost, High-Risk Environment

Instructions: Evaluate each potential risk using a 1-5 scale for Likelihood and Impact. Risk Score = Likelihood × Impact.

Risk Factor	Likelihood (1-5)	Impact (1-5)	Risk Score	Mitigation Strategy
Severe Weather				
Travel Disruptions				
Labor Strike				
Public Health Issue				
Political/Social Unrest				
Cybersecurity Incident				
Venue Operational Failure				
Speaker Cancellation				
Budget Overrun				
Low Attendance				
Reputational Risk				
Other				

High-Cost / High-Risk Planning Checklist

Financial Stewardship

- Airfare costs reviewed
- Hotel rates benchmarked
- Food & beverage costs analyzed
- Transportation expenses identified
- Hidden costs evaluated
- Budget contingency included
- Cost increases forecasted

Risk & Duty of Care

- Destination safety reviewed
- Weather risks assessed
- Public health considerations reviewed
- Political/social environment monitored
- Emergency response procedures reviewed
- Security resources identified
- Insurance requirements evaluated

Attendee Experience

- Destination accessibility reviewed
- Travel burden evaluated
- Attendee appeal considered
- Networking opportunities assessed

Accessibility and inclusion needs addressed

Local attractions and amenities reviewed

Operations & Logistics

Venue capacity confirmed

Technology requirements reviewed

Transportation infrastructure assessed

Vendor reliability verified

Staffing availability evaluated

Backup plans developed

Executive & Stakeholder Alignment

Procurement consulted

Finance consulted

Leadership priorities identified

Meeting objectives aligned with destination

ROI expectations defined

Success metrics established

Communication strategy prepared

Executive Communication Template

Meeting/Event: _____

Date: _____

Attendance: _____

Meeting Objectives: _____

Recommendation

Destination: _____

Venue: _____

Financial Stewardship

Total projected cost: \$ _____

Budget efficiencies identified: _____

Risk Assessment

Key risks identified and mitigation strategies.

Business Value

How this destination supports organizational goals.

ROI & Success Measures

Attendance, Satisfaction, Revenue Impact, Engagement, Other.

30-Second Executive Recommendation

We recommend _____ because it provides the strongest balance of financial stewardship, attendee experience, organizational objectives, and risk management.