



The MPIFC Economic Impact Study: 'What about the Butcher?'

Trace the history of MPI Foundation Canada (MPIFC) to its roots, and you'll find that one of the founding visions was of a study that would credibly demonstrate the economic impact of the Canadian meetings industry.

That vision is about to be fulfilled through a Canada-wide survey that began April 17. Email questionnaires to randomly-chosen meeting planners, venue representatives, and delegates are to be completed by the end of June.

"This is a tremendously exciting moment for meeting professionals from coast to coast," said Rita Plaskett, CMP, CMM, chair of the industry advisory council overseeing the project.

"This study will put credible numbers behind the jobs our industry creates and the economic benefits we generate in communities across Canada," she added. "Without a doubt, it is the most important research the Foundation will undertake this decade."

Project manager Mitchell Beer, CMM has a single message for MPI members: "If you're asked to participate, *please* say 'Yes!'"

The survey's designers know that the meetings industry is deadline driven and meeting professionals are busy people. They also know that low response rates have been a challenge with similar surveys in other countries. As a result, they have paid close attention to making the Canadian survey as easy as possible to complete.

"It need not be done all at once, or all by one person in an organization," says Beer. Respondents can answer some of the questions and come back later, or pass parts of the survey along to others. "We're trusting that members will see the value and buy in."

Why should they buy in? Because the economic impact of meetings and events is substantial—and substantially under-rated outside the industry. They know that will only change with credible data. And they know credibility rests on both quality and quantity.

"It's a big enough task to tally room nights purchased, planning hours invested, and meals served," says Beer. "But one of our questions is, what about the butcher?"

When thousands of people roll into town for a city-wide conference, he explains, the butcher shop is just one of the local businesses that respond. While event preparations are under way, the butcher sees increased demand for steaks, chops, and ribs. A week later, the shop goes back to supplying weddings, receptions, and grocery stores.

Just as suddenly as it became a part of the meetings economy, the butcher shop drops out of it. But in the meantime, the company has earned income, created dozens of hours of employment, and generated tax revenues to three levels of government. It may

have hired new employees or initiated relationships with new suppliers, and those people, too, temporarily became part of the meetings economy.

“How do we credibly measure that?” asks Beer. “How do we assemble those numbers so that, when decisions are being made that affect our industry, we can talk about our impact?” That’s what the MPIFC Economic Impact Study is designed to do, and why Beer and the Foundation Board are encouraging those who are asked to respond to do so.

Conducted by Maritz Research Canada and the Conference Board of Canada with technical advice from Scott Meis, former director of research at the Canadian Tourism Commission, the study will be complete by February, 2008. It will result in the creation of an economic model that will reflect dollars spent, revenues generated, jobs created, and taxes paid as a result of meetings activity across Canada. The consultants will recommend ways to use the data for maximum impact, as well as suggesting future research questions and ideas for refining the model.

“Maritz Research Canada is thrilled to be leading this important initiative for MPI,” said Managing Director Robert Daniel. “This study will for the first time give the meetings and events industry a resonating measure of its economic contribution.”