

Smartmeetings

Meetings Diversity Undergoes a Renovation

New trends and challenges are emerging in the meetings industry

Minority groups naturally come together to resist and mingle, and in so doing need a venue to congregate and discuss, to celebrate and bond. For some time now, the meetings and hospitality industry has provided a variety of safe, encouraging spaces for those who identify as minorities.

The meetings business is often in the vanguard of inclusion and tolerance for all people, regardless of race or orientation. Yet diversity within the workforce still is somewhat lacking. Unforeseen challenges arise, and for every step forward against discrimination, new issues emerge.



This year, the industry is sharply focused on proactive policies and new, forward-thinking offerings. President Donald Trump's administration has rolled out strict travel policies, keeping the industry on high alert to accommodate and inform clients. Transgender equality and understanding, comfortable quiet spaces for breast-feeding women, and veterans' unique needs are becoming part of everyday vocabulary when it comes to event planning and preparation.

But being a truly diverse industry takes more than incorporating disenfranchised groups: It means being accepting of all people sincerely, and without exception.

How does the meetings and events industry achieve this? A first step is to make diversity a priority in mottoes and verbiage. After all, words are powerful. A next step is to take action. Destinations must project an open-minded and inclusive image in order to attract event planners and meeting groups.

Here's a look at how some top destinations, venues and organizations have responded to the growing call for diversity.

Wrapping Up

The Trump administration's policies and rhetoric have raised concerns among some meetings industry leaders. The travel ban imposed earlier this year has been halted, at least for the time being, but it is still an issue for global corporations invested in meetings within the United States.

“We are monitoring the issue, and we hope it can be resolved soon in a manner that strikes a fair and reasonable balance between travel and security concerns,” says Richard Scharf, president and CEO of Visit Denver.

Holly Strout, director of diversity and inclusion for PTE Productions, an Orlando events firm, is no stranger to the challenges that the meetings industry faces. She feels that the new administration needs to reach out to work with diverse groups in a positive way, as they form a large part of the multibillion-dollar service and hospitality industry. She says that even negative rhetoric can inspire bonding and grassroots positivity.

“People who were previously intolerant are now coming out as accepting and tolerant,” she says. “People are coming out more and more to join the wave of positivity and diversity in our country.”

Strout feels lucky to be a part of a company so devoted to this concept both within the corporate culture and with clients.

“As stewards of our clients’ ROI, we invest responsibly and collaborate with them, including their diversity, culture and community outreach to make every event a success,” Strout says. “Inclusion captures, in one word, everyone—military, disabled, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, personality, etc. One group is not more important than another: Every group is important. True equality is the most important thing.”