



## GRANT REVISIONS "JUST A START"

**THE** Business Events Council of Australia (BECA) says it considers tweaks to the Government's \$50 million Business Events Grants program (**BEN** breaking news) to be just a "starting point of what is required by Government to support the sector".

Announced among a \$1.2 billion aviation and tourism support package by Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Tourism Minister Dan Tehan last week, the updated guidelines for the grants scheme have been introduced following strong feedback from industry.

Changes include a reduction in the minimum grant amount to \$5,000 to allow smaller businesses the opportunity to apply; increasing the sponsorship cap; increasing the number of delegates covered by the grant; and expanding the priority sectors for qualifying business events.

In addition, the program is being extended for events scheduled through to 31 Mar 2022 to allow gatherings which were postponed early this year the opportunity to benefit.

Applications for the grant have been extended until 30 Jun 2021, and Expressions of Interest for event owners to have their event included on the Schedule of Approved Business Events will also



reopen early next month.

However among the new announcements has come confirmation that the JobKeeper program will not be extended, even for sectors which continue to be heavily impacted by international border closures.

BECA said it would continue to work with the Government on mechanisms to get in-person business events back on schedule for associations and corporations, and "stem the flow to virtual meetings where little economic benefit is realised".

The Council said its input had contributed to the new grants program guidelines, which will assist in a greater distribution of funds and contribute vital cash flow to the supply chain.

However a recent survey of

business owners, contractors and industry freelancers had reiterated the need for more targeted support to ensure the sector does not use its critical core capacity and capability.

BECA Chair Vanessa Findlay said: "given the challenges we are facing with operating restrictions, border closures, consumer confidence to travel to participate in events and the lead time required to plan and deliver events, our research shows the industry is still 9-12 months away from any significant return to business operations".

She said BECA looked forward to continuing its consultation with the Government to develop targeted solutions to achieve these outcomes as a priority.

## Voyages tick

**VOYAGES** Indigenous Tourism Australia has been certified as an indigenous supplier by Supply Nation.

The move is said to give meeting planners yet another reason to choose Ayers Rock Resort as a venue for their next event.

The Supply Nation tick, which sees Voyages verified as a bona fide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business, will see businesses with a designated Reconciliation Action Plan use their business events booking at the property to meet their indigenous spending targets.

Voyages CEO Matt Cameron-Smith said events organisers can know they are channelling their spend in the right direction, with the move ultimately ensuring a more ethical supply chain - more info via [conference@voyages.com.au](mailto:conference@voyages.com.au).

## MCEC lives on

**MELBOURNE** Convention & Exhibition Centre (MCEC) will next week see a return to live exhibitions for the first time in over a year, with the Gift & Lifestyle Fair scheduled to take place 20-22 Mar.

Effective 20 Mar, capacity at the venue will double to 10,000 patrons per event space per day at a maximum of 75% of capacity, with time-based sessions subject to density limits.

Other upcoming events at MCEC include the Pregnancy, Babies and Children's Expo in May, as well as The Lume immersive art experience which opens in autumn.



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## PCMA calendar

**THE** Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) has launched a Mar-May Event Calendar showcasing webinars, meet-ups, case studies and Customer Deep Dives with industry professionals.

PCMA is also reworking its Digital Event Strategist course - see [pcma.org/apac](http://pcma.org/apac).



**IRISH** eyes will hopefully be smiling tomorrow in NSW, where a pending Government decision is expected to allow a relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions and allow patrons to drink while standing up at hospitality venues across the state.

The move, which will of course also make a huge difference for event organisers, will coincide perfectly with St Patrick's Day, the annual global celebration of all things Irish.

The prospective easing will also come in handy for attendees quaffing bubbles at the hotly anticipated opening night of the hip-hop historic musical *Hamilton* at the city's Lyric Theatre.

## Qld event funding

**THE** Queensland Government has launched a new National Business Events Program, with the aim of recruiting Australian corporates to hold their conferences, conventions and other business events in Qld.

The scheme will focus on national associations or corporate events with more than 350 delegates.

Half of all attendees must live outside the Local Government Area where the event is being held, and stay at least two days.

Funding, available for between \$17,500 and \$95,000, is to be spent in Queensland to cover costs associated with the event venue, delegate accommodation and/or ground transfers.

The scheme covers \$50 per delegate for two-day events or \$100 per attendee for three-day events or more.

For more details on eligibility criteria and application info see [teq.queensland.com/events](http://teq.queensland.com/events).

## PCOA plots Tassie gathering

**THE** Professional Conference Organisers Association (PCOA) has announced plans to hold its 14th annual Conference and Exhibition at Hobart's Hotel Grand Chancellor from 05-07 Dec this year.

The association said PCOA2021 will "offer the opportunity to re-calibrate, reinvigorate and reconnect, to find an island of clarity among the chaos".

Content will be curated to address the most pressing issues of the industry,

including sustainability, the trend towards live experiences and human connection, the ongoing march of technology and reaching delegates in the age of information overload.

Another key topic will be the opportunity to reposition the role of event planners as "partners and trusted advisors".

The Dec event will build on last year's PCOA conference which was delivered to more than 480 attendees in a hybrid format across seven venues in Australia and NZ.

# Confessions of a compulsive conference-goer

Andrew Klein, professional MC and presentation skills speaker and director of SPIKE Presentations, presents his front line observations on conferences in a regular feature in *BEN*.

## My Audience Love Affair

**LAST** week I was fortunate enough to MC and speak on a panel at an association event in Mackay QLD. It was an event in many respects not unlike countless conferences and events that I have worked on in my 25+ years in this amazing events industry.

Similar pattern. Pack bag, leave office, Uber, airport, flight, airport, Uber, hotel, next morning turn up to Convention Centre, meet client, final briefing, jump on stage, welcome, thank sponsors, intro speakers, house-keeping, highlight key messages, participate in panel session, wrap-up, thanks, Uber, airport, flight, airport, Uber, home.

I've worked on so many events of this nature over the years that it's a very familiar pattern. Rinse and repeat.

But, and I suspect you see where I'm heading here – last week's event was nothing like any event I had worked on for the last 12 months. This one had a Live Audience. And being in Far North QLD, it had a large, 530 person Live Audience. That's 530, living, breathing, smiling, clapping, buzzing face-to-face, table sitting, talking, laughing.... interacting people. It was heavenly.

Now in my career I've done a huge number of events with 530 people - and a great many with many thousands of people, so this was not really all that different. But I can safely say, after a year's hiatus, this was by far the most appreciative I have ever been to be standing on a

large convention centre stage surrounded by a large crowd. And after the year gone by, to be standing on a stage full stop. With a crowd of any size, full stop. I fell in love again with my live audience. I smiled the whole time.

I have to admit, I'd taken that part of events for granted. A large visible audience was part and parcel of all my conferences and events. Until it wasn't. And then I missed them.

It was very much like a rocky relationship. Live Audience and Me. Last March we split up and sadly we separated. Went our own ways. I managed fine on my own, saw a few other people.

Got by quite well. But now here we were a year later - and we reunited and got back together after a tough year apart!!! I feel we still have a long way to go and our problems are far from over, we may even split again for a while, but it's so nice to have reunited with my lovely Live Audience.

I do though love my relationship with you, Virtual Audience, I learnt to live with you in 2020 and at times to love you. And I think our love affair will continue forever, in one form or another.

But I feel optimistic now that we will be in a weird threesome – me, Live Audience and Virtual Audience. We will learn to co-exist and support each other. And as for my long-time love – Live Audience....it's so great to be back with you. I will never take you for granted again.

Andrew Klein is 'Virtually an MC' and runs webinars on 'How to Pitch & Present in an Online Environment'. [www.andrewklein.com.au](http://www.andrewklein.com.au)

