

# PARTNERING WITH A DMO

HERE'S WHY UNLOCKING DESTINATION  
EXPERTISE EARLY IN THE PLANNING STAGE WILL  
MAXIMIZE YOUR EVENT'S SUCCESS.

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# PARTNERING WITH A DMO: MAXIMIZING YOUR EVENT'S SUCCESS

BY MARK CHESNUT

Whether you call them destination marketing organizations (DMOs), convention and visitors bureaus (CVBs) or simply tourism offices, the mission of these organizations remains the same when it comes to meetings and events: to help create successful, impactful gatherings. Yet some planners may not be taking full advantage of what DMOs offer, according to several experts.

“There’s this quiet fear among some planners that reaching out to a DMO signals weakness, like it means you don’t know what you’re doing,” said Staceyann Doria, founder and CEO of [The Event Narrative](#). “That’s false — and honestly, a little dangerous. We work in a collaborative industry where success is built on using the right tools and people at the right time. Tapping into a DMO doesn’t diminish your expertise — it multiplies it.”

Emily Scheiderer, senior director, education, sales and services at [Destinations International](#), says that planners need to better understand what DMOs do in order to benefit the most from their services. “There are a lot of misconceptions and a general lack of understanding around the role of destination organizations,” she said. “While they offer significant value, many planners either underutilize them or don’t fully understand how to engage them strategically.”



## GETTING THE BALL ROLLING WITH A DMO

To get the most from working with a DMO, it’s crucial to start early, according to Doria. “Day one,” she advised, “I’m talking before the RFP, before you pick dates, before you start building out that version one budget. Reaching out to a DMO in the research and pre-planning phase gives you access to someone who knows that destination inside and out. They can help you avoid overlap with major citywide events, give you realistic budget expectations and even help you reframe your goals based on what’s possible.”

J.J. Wills, senior vice president, marketing programs and business development at [ConferenceDirect](#), agrees. “I always recommend looping in the DMO at the very start of the site selection process,” she said. “They offer critical insights into the destination — things you might not find with a quick Google search — and they’ve been invaluable in connecting us with the





right hotel and vendor partners.

In Philadelphia, they helped us communicate with the convention center and navigate their rules and requirements to ensure smooth planning and execution.”

Scheiderer urges planners to address important issues during their initial conversations with DMO representatives — including event strategy, the planner’s definition of success and the event’s history. “Be transparent about past performance,” she said. “The destination will likely receive this information eventually, so sharing it up front saves time and positions them to offer stronger support.”

Early engagement also helps to ensure better alignment across all partners, Scheiderer adds. “The CVB/DMO should be your first partner in the planning process, but that doesn’t mean you can’t also engage your trusted hotel contacts, destination management companies (DMC), and other partners early on,” she said. “Including the CVB/DMO from the start simply enhances collaboration across all stakeholders and creates a stronger foundation for your event.”

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DESTINATIONS INTERNATIONAL

Valerie Bihet, founder and owner of the [VIBE Agency](#), a DMC, describes how DMOs complement the services of companies like hers. “The DMOs are the best advocates for a destination,” she said. “Meeting planners need to use them to get the lay of the land, to understand the city assets, to uncover the big picture of possibilities. Once the meeting planner is committed to the destination, that’s where a DMC can step in, and we will combine forces. We let the DMO open the door and then we bring the vision to life on the ground.”

## BENEFITING FROM LOCAL EXPERTISE

An effective DMO can connect planners with experiences and insights like only a local can do, according to Doria. “They bridge the gap between big picture and local flavor,” she said. “DMOs know what’s trending and what’s tired or overhyped in their destination. They can connect you to cultural experiences, local businesses or speakers that wow attendees and align with your stakeholders’ brand or mission. They can help you find the hidden gems in the destination that really leave a lasting impact on attendees.”

Wills shared an example. “The Philadelphia CVB was instrumental in helping us bring Philly flair to life throughout our 2025 Annual Partner Meeting,” she said. “They helped us create a customized amenity lounge where attendees could choose a souvenir crafted by a local artisan, and they even arranged for Mummers to welcome and entertain attendees at our closing party. Those thoughtful, localized touches made the experience unforgettable.”



▲ The lively Mummers are a colorful nod to folklore, fun, and a longstanding tradition in Philadelphia.



## CONNECTING WITH THE RIGHT PARTNERS

Finding the most appropriate venue or supplier is easier with a DMO's insider knowledge, according to Doria. "Think of them as your city translator," she said. "They know which venues work for which types of programs, what construction might impact traffic next year, and which neighborhoods will give you the best bang. They help cut through the marketing fluff and give you real tea."

DMOs are also useful for putting planners in touch with local DMCs, according to Bihet. "If you don't have any referrals, if you don't have any knowledge of the destination, go to the DMO first, and the DMO can point you to two or three DMCs," she explained.

Today's DMOs are also adapting to new tech demands by fostering relationships with tech-savvy suppliers, Doria notes. "I'm starting to see more with access to streaming support, immersive tech vendors and local AV companies that know what they're doing in the hybrid space," she said. "A few even have digital content studios or at least know where to find them."

Securing competitive rates is yet another area where DMOs can help. "They've cultivated trusted, long-standing connections in their destination and can open doors we didn't even know existed," Doria said. "They can leverage citywide buying power, flag upcoming high-demand windows you may not be aware of and make strategic intros to partners who actually deliver. You're not just cold-calling a vendor — you're coming in with the DMO's stamp of approval, and that shifts the entire dynamic."

DMOs are also helpful at introducing planners to suppliers and venues that align with sustainability goals, according to Doria. "They know who walks the walk," she explained. "A good DMO will have a list of sustainable venues, caterers, transportation options and waste-reduction programs. They can also help you communicate these initiatives to attendees and stakeholders, so the efforts don't just live behind the scenes."

Scheiderer echoed that point. "CVBs/DMOs understand where events have the greatest impact locally — whether residential areas affected by noise, traffic congestion near venues or infrastructure stress during peak periods," she said. "They can advise on dates and locations that reduce disruption, suggest local partners with sustainable practices and guide communications that are mindful of both attendee experience and community and resident well-being."

## IMPROVING THE ATTENDEE EXPERIENCE

Recommending unique local experi-

ences is another valuable service that DMOs offer. "Ask them what locals do and then go one step deeper," said Doria. "DMOs can connect planners with emerging chefs, neighborhood-based experiences, local artists or behind-the-scenes access to places most visitors never see."

Scheiderer agrees. "This is where the CVB/DMO becomes an indispensable partner," she said. "They understand the heartbeat of their destination and its neighborhoods, culture, cuisine and people. They know where the real stories live and how to create opportunities for attendees to experience the destination with all five senses."

Scheiderer praised the ability of DMOs to identify and integrate "local intellectual capital" that can strengthen the program content. "By tapping into the destination's human, cultural, economic and academic assets, you unlock a layer of value that can't be replicated elsewhere. It transforms your event from a gathering to a destination-exclusive experience," she said.



You get better rates, better service and a whole lot more respect in the process.”

Bihet notes that DMOs also sometimes help with large-scale marketing efforts. “For big shows, you need to go through the DMO, because you — the meeting planner — can negotiate marketing funds to promote the conference and the destination together,” she explained.

## THE FUTURE OF COLLABORATION

The meetings and event industry is evolving, and so is the role of the DMO. “With a greater emphasis on impact, inclusion and innovation, they’ll play a vital role in helping events support local economies and meet ESG [Environmental, Social and Governance] goals,” said Doria. “Smart planners should start building relationships with DMOs like they would with production partners or agencies, because in a few years, that partnership could be what sets their event apart.”

Scheiderer points out that while AI may change some aspects of planning, it can’t replace everything that DMOs do. “AI can surface data and resources quickly, [but] it can’t replicate the depth of local relationships, cultural context or human insight that a DMO brings to the table,” she said. “That level of personalization requires real and local connections, which is exactly where DMOs excel. As events continue to evolve, DMOs aren’t just logistical partners. They’re becoming strategic collaborators.” ■

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## THE PHILADELPHIA CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU: A PARTNER FOR SEAMLESS MEETINGS

Effective partnerships are crucial for meeting planners. And the [Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau](#) (PHLCVB) is positioning itself as an especially strong ally for meeting professionals, with a wide array of services and support.

PHLCVB officials tout the organization’s ability to offer unparalleled local knowledge, expert guidance, time-saving tools and a dedicated sales and service team that’s laser focused on helping planners succeed.

The organization’s specialized business development divisions are yet another example of the PHLCVB’s industry-leading approach to events. PHL Life Sciences, for example, is the first and only division of its kind in the nation, while PHL Diversity and PHL Sports provide more ways for planners to connect with local stakeholders and community partners to create productive, engaging and inclusive events. Throughout the process, planners can count on hands-on assistance from the sales and service team — from initial RFPs through post-event evaluations, from venue selection to hotel blocks.

In addition, the PHLCVB empowers planners with a variety of online planning tools, including a venue search feature, business directory, diversity resource guide, and comprehensive destination planning guide.

Among the organizations to have benefited from the PHLCVB’s services recently is the Alzheimer’s Association International Conference. The PHLCVB worked closely with organizers to maximize the event’s potential, with measurably positive results. With strong attendance, local academic partnerships and smooth operations, the conference exceeded expectations and underscored the bureau’s ability to elevate meeting programs.

Philadelphia’s legendary appeal, of course, also makes it an especially attractive destination for meetings and events. Recognized by USA Today as the “Most Walkable City to Visit” for two years in a row, the city’s convenient layout places a variety of hotels, event venues and restaurants all within walking distance. The city is also supremely accessible for both domestic and international groups, thanks to extensive rail connections as well as flights into Philadelphia International Airport.

With its strategic northeast location and group-friendly facilities, Philadelphia attracts meetings and events from around the globe. The PHLCVB, with its decidedly forward-thinking approach to the MICE segment, serves as the logical first step for planners looking to make the most of all the city has to offer.

Start planning your next meeting, convention or event at [discoverPHL.com](#).



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