

20 SPEAKING
24 INDUSTRY
BENCHMARK
REPORT



An inside look at the speaking industry

It's no secret that the event industry is constantly evolving. Sometimes the changes are massive shifts that seem to happen all at once, but more often, our industry is going through smaller, incremental changes thanks to emerging technologies and new audience preferences.

Event organizers and speakers are able to thrive in the midst of these changes because of their ability to pivot and adapt. At AAE Speakers Bureau, we get a front row seat to how our clients turn challenges into opportunities to improve their process and elevate attendee experience.

In this 2024 Speaking Industry Benchmark Report, our third annual installment of this report, you'll find insider knowledge from event organizers and keynote speakers on the entire event planning process – from choosing a speaker to orchestrating an unforgettable event experience – as well as predictions and reflections on what lies ahead for our industry.

"This 2024 Speaking Industry Benchmark Report, while purely a prediction, gives us all a clearer look at the months ahead, opening the door to better informed, data-driven decisions. Thanks to the hundreds of participants who shared their insights, we are in a better position to create dynamic event experiences for attendees in 2024."

– Greg Friedlander, CEO and Founder, AAE Speakers Bureau

Breakdown of Survey Participants Page 5

A closer look at the event organizers and keynote speakers we surveyed to create this report

Events in 2024 by the Numbers Pages 6 - 10

A breakdown of all kinds of stats about our industry including numbers of events and audience size

Preparing to Book Pages 11 - 17

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How event organizers handle different event formats, final prep timing, changes to speech content, challenges

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Strategies for building community, measuring ROI of events, AI for event planning tasks, biggest predictions

2023 to 2024: Biggest Changes and Trends Page 28

The most notable differences between 2023 results and what we learned this year

82% Are planning the **same amount or more events in 2024**

In our 2024 survey of event organizers, just 18.24% of respondents said they are planning fewer events this year. **81.76% told us they're planning the same amount or more in 2024.**

Leadership and motivation: the top speaking topic in 2024 **40%**

Leadership and motivation (**40.29%**) is the number one speaking topic that event organizers are prioritizing this year, **followed by DEI (37.65%) and AI (36.18%).**

78% Events planned to be **in-person**

On average, **78.49% of events planned** by our respondents in 2024 will be in-person. In 2023, that percentage was 69.31%, demonstrating the return to in-person events has arrived.

Event organizers in 2024 want **audience engagement** **67%**

Event organizers want a **speaker who can engage their audience (66.76%)**, provide an educational factor (49.12%), and allow them to stay within their budget (40.59%).

70% Speakers want **relevant topics** for their bookings

Keynote speakers are looking for **events that are relevant to their expertise (70.37%)**, pay them their ideal speaking fee (62.43%), and align with their values (41.27%).

Percentage of event organizers who are **embracing AI in 2024** **43%**

42.65% of event organizers use AI in their role, with 88.28% of those indicating that they use **ChatGPT**. The most common task they are using AI to assist with is **generating event descriptions.**

We surveyed 718 event industry professionals.

340

Event Organizers

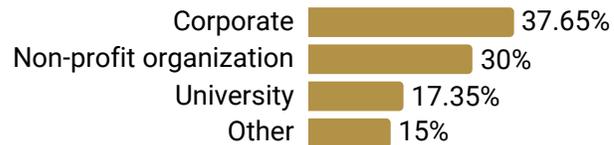


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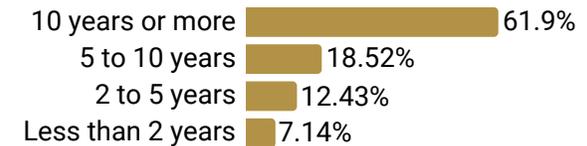
Keynote Speakers



What kinds of events do they plan?



How many years of speaking experience?



How many events should we expect this year?

We've seen firsthand the power that events have to connect and energize audiences of all kinds. Here's some good news. In our 2024 survey of event organizers, **81.76%** of event organizers told us they're planning the **same amount or more events in 2024**, with **22.05%** of those event organizers moving full steam ahead on plans to **increase their number of events**.

How large will these events be in 2024? While audience size averaged out to around 730 attendees, **65%** of event organizers gave answers in the **"100 to 500" range**. Another **23.24%** said their average audience size is **greater than 500**. We saw the fewest responses in the **"less than 100" range**, with **11.76%** of respondents selecting that option.

81.76%

of event organizers are planning **the same amount of events or more** than they did in 2023.



731

Average audience size
for events in 2024

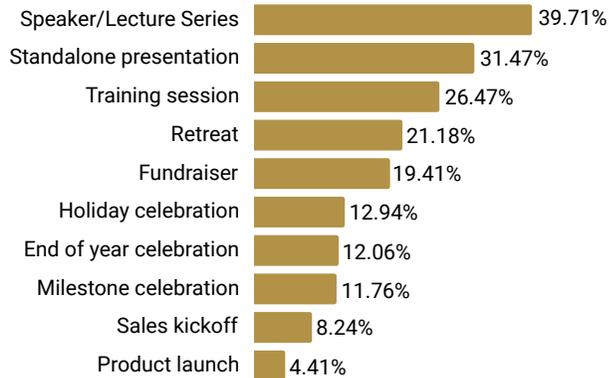
Does total audience size influence speaking fees? Speakers said:



What kinds of events are planned this year?

We can expect more event organizers will increase their number of events in 2024 than cutting back. Let's talk about what we can expect these events to look like. The top kinds of events we heard about were **speaker series** and **standalone speaker presentations**, at **39.71%** and **31.47%** respectively. Other frequent answers were **training sessions and retreats**, indicating that organizations are investing in their personnel in 2024.

Event organizers are planning these kinds of events in 2024



Key Takeaways by Sector: Top event type being planned in 2024

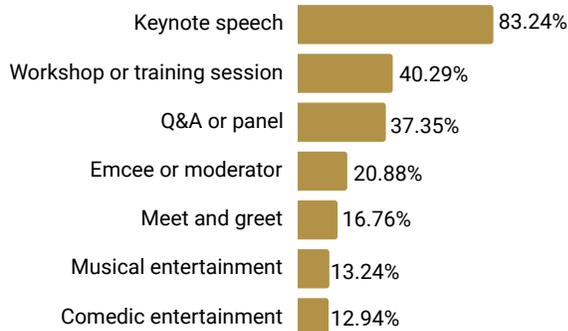


What kinds of presentations are being booked?

When booking a speaker for an event, event organizers are most commonly hiring them for a **keynote speech**, which works out nicely, since speakers listed it as their number one choice of format at events.

Some unique trends began to emerge when looking further at each of the sectors we compared. Universities were far more likely to request a panel or Q&A format from speakers (59.32%) while Corporations requested Emcees and Moderators more often than the average (30.47%)

At these events, event organizers will hire speakers for:



66.67%

of speakers said a **keynote speech** is their favorite format to work with at events.

Presentation Style Highlights by Sector

Emcee or Moderator

37%

Corporations

Meet & Greets

20%

Non-profit associations

Panel or Q&A Format

59%

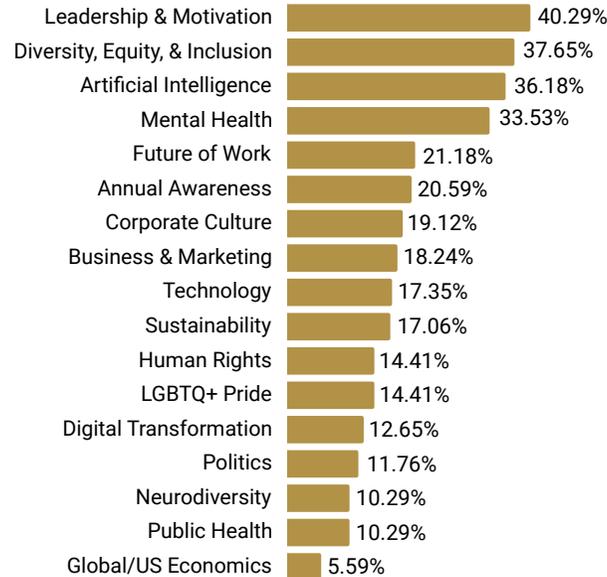
Universities

Which speaking topics are trending in 2024?

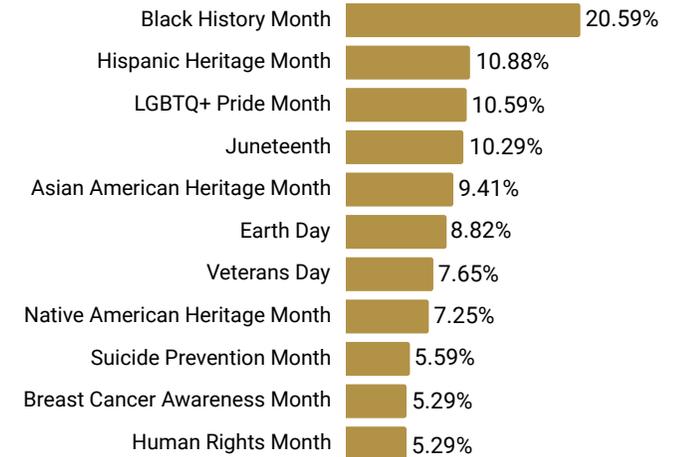
Getting a clear understanding of events in 2024 means forecasting which topics will be driving important discussions. We asked event organizers which speaking topics they are planning events around this year. **Leadership and motivation** was the top answer, coming in at **40.29%**, and leapfrogging DEI, which was number one in 2023.

As expected, **artificial intelligence** landed firmly in the top five topics this year, coming in at number three with 36.18% of event organizers indicating they are planning events on the topic of AI. **Commemoration and awareness events** came in at **20.59%**, and **Black History Month** was the top answer in that category.

Topics event organizers are planning for this year:



Commemoration and Awareness Events being planned for in 2024:



67.06%

of event organizers **fit the speaker into the content** and topic of the event.

23.24%

of event organizers say they **choose a speaker based on their expertise area** even if it's different from the event theme.

9.71%

of event organizers say they **plan the content of their event around the keynote speaker** they book.

78.49%

of events planned by our respondents in 2024 will be **in person**.

69.31%

of 2023 events that keynote speakers respondents participated in were **in person**.



55.45%

of **in-person events**, on average, will **also utilize live streaming or a recording** that can be played back for a virtual audience.

33.7%

of 2023 events that keynote speakers respondents participated in **had this hybrid setup**.



19.49%

of events planned by our respondents in 2024 will be **entirely virtual**.

Which event format will forge connections in 2024?

The event organizers we surveyed made one thing clear: that **return to in-person events** our industry has talked about for years is undoubtedly here. In our 2023 report, in-person events made up 54.91% of events planned, according to respondents. This year, that number has jumped to **78.49%**. Virtual events, which were at 29.02% of events in 2023, now make up **19.49%** of 2024 events planned. But that doesn't mean virtual is going away.

What we're seeing is that virtual elements are coming to be seen and treated as a normal element to any solid event, with live streams expanding access, allowing even larger audiences to tune in and hear talented speakers take the stage. Event organizers indicated that, on average, **55.45%** of their in-person events will also **utilize live streaming or a recording** that can be played back for a virtual audience.

When does the speaker booking process get rolling?

Nearly half (46.18%) of the event organizers planning in-person events said they start looking for keynote speakers **between two and six months before** their event, 47.35% answered in the **six months to a year range**, and only 3.24% said they book **more than a year before** their event. Some are operating on much shorter turnarounds, with 2.94% saying they book within two months of their event or even closer.

While keynote speakers answers fell into ranges a bit closer to the event, we saw that both keynote speakers and event organizers prefer to have **months of advance notice before an event**. This ensures that event organizers can find the ideal speaker for their events and that speakers can be as prepared as possible to deliver a dazzling presentation. With both groups appreciating extra room for preparation, it's **likely that the two parties will align on their timing**.

In-Person Events

When to start the process

78.53%

EVENT ORGANIZERS:
4 months or more

71.16%

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:
4 months or more

Virtual Events

When to start the process

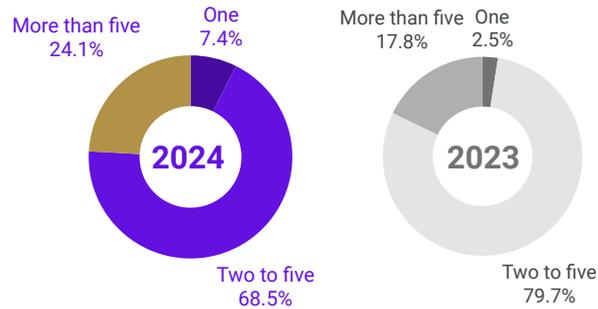
39.41%

EVENT ORGANIZERS:
4 months or less

92.07%

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:
4 months or less

Event organizers on how many people are involved in the speaker selection decision:



Who are the decision makers for speaker bookings?

Selecting the perfect speaker is a big decision for event organizers, so it's good that they're largely not making this decision alone. Only **7.35%** said that they were the **sole decision maker** involved. Of those with multiple decision makers, only **24.12%** said that **more than five people** were involved. It seems that **two to five people** is the most common zone for most, with **68.53%** of respondents falling in that range.

Key Takeaways by Sector: Number of decision makers involved

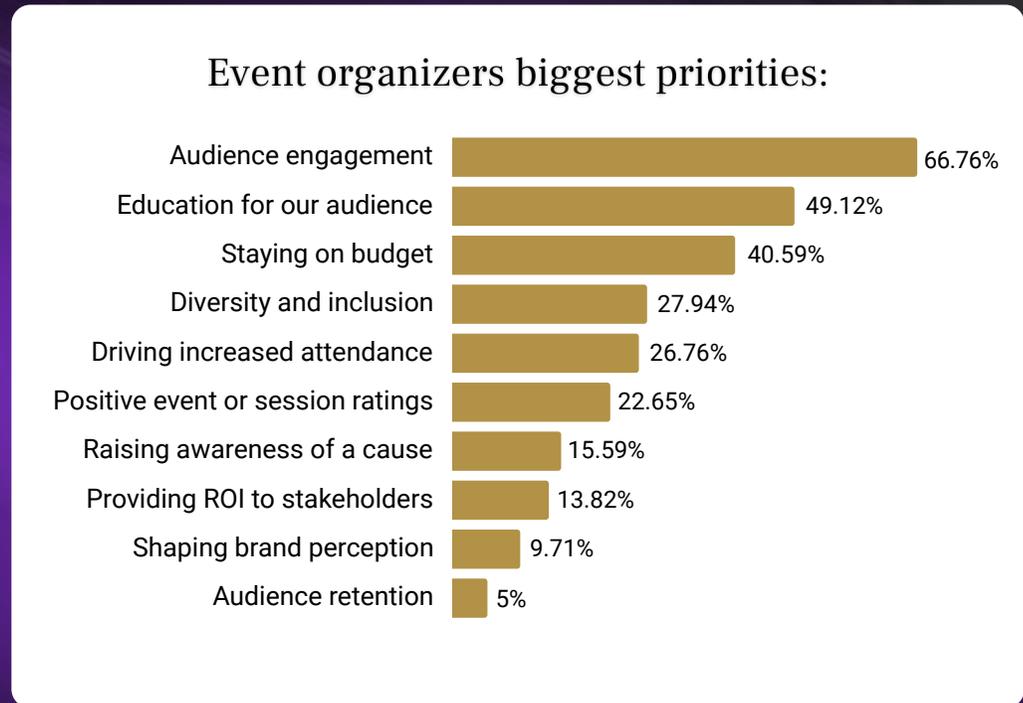
14% **Non-profit associations** are more than 2x as likely to have a **single decision maker**.
(14% vs 7% average)

Universities are more likely to have **more than 5 decision makers** than any other sector. **37%**
(37% vs 24% average)

81% **Corporations** are more likely to have **2 to 5 decision makers** than any other sector.
(81% vs 69% average)

What are event organizers biggest priorities when booking a speaker?

When event organizers are looking for that perfect speaker for their event, according to the top answers we received, they're looking for someone who can **engage their audience (66.76%)**, provide an **educational factor (49.12%)**, and allow them to **stay within their budget (40.59%)**. Other priorities include diversity and inclusion, increased attendance, and positive ratings.



What do keynote speakers want out of their bookings?

On the flipside, keynote speakers' top answers indicate they are looking for events that are **relevant to their expertise (70.37%)**, pay them their **ideal speaking fee (62.43%)**, and **align with their values (41.27%)**. Additionally, keynote speakers told us they value whether the event is in a desirable location, matches their ideal audience preferences, and aligns with their favorite event formats.

Keynote speakers' biggest priorities when they choose their bookings:



70.37%

Topic relevance

62.43%

Pays ideal fee

41.27%

Aligns with values



How speakers bureaus are chosen

Speakers bureaus are companies who facilitate the connection of speakers and organizations seeking speakers for events, conferences, and performances. Many of the event organizers who responded to this year’s survey (92%) have worked with a speakers bureau as have 76% of the speakers who responded. For event organizers, their primary two concerns are value (69%) and being easy to work with (58%), while speakers placed being easy to work with at the top of their list (61%) along with professionalism (47%).

76.19%

of keynote speakers said they worked with a speakers bureau in 2023.

How event organizers choose bureaus:

69.41%

Price

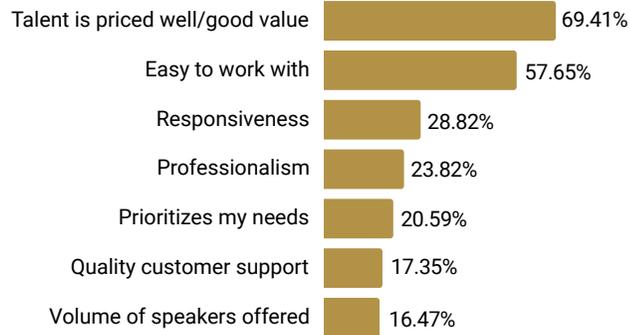
57.65%

Exceptional Service

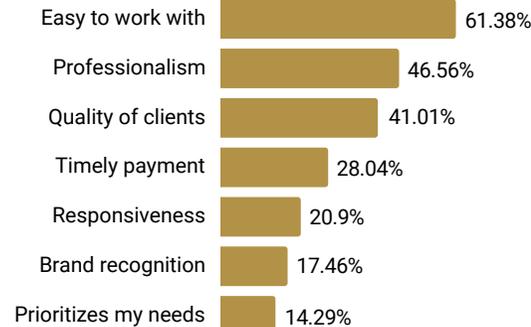
28.82%

Agent Responsiveness

What event organizers want most in a speakers bureau:

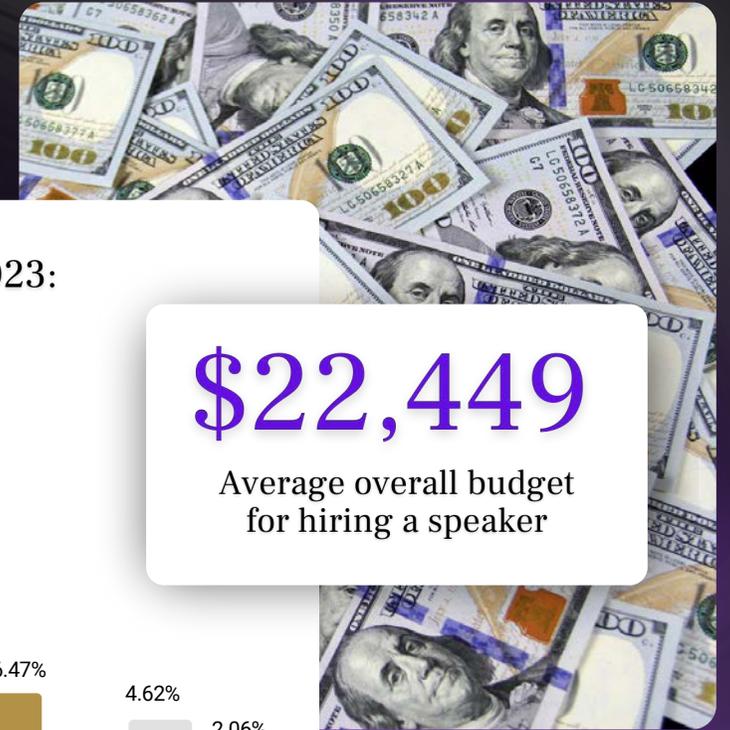


What keynote speakers want most in a speakers bureau:

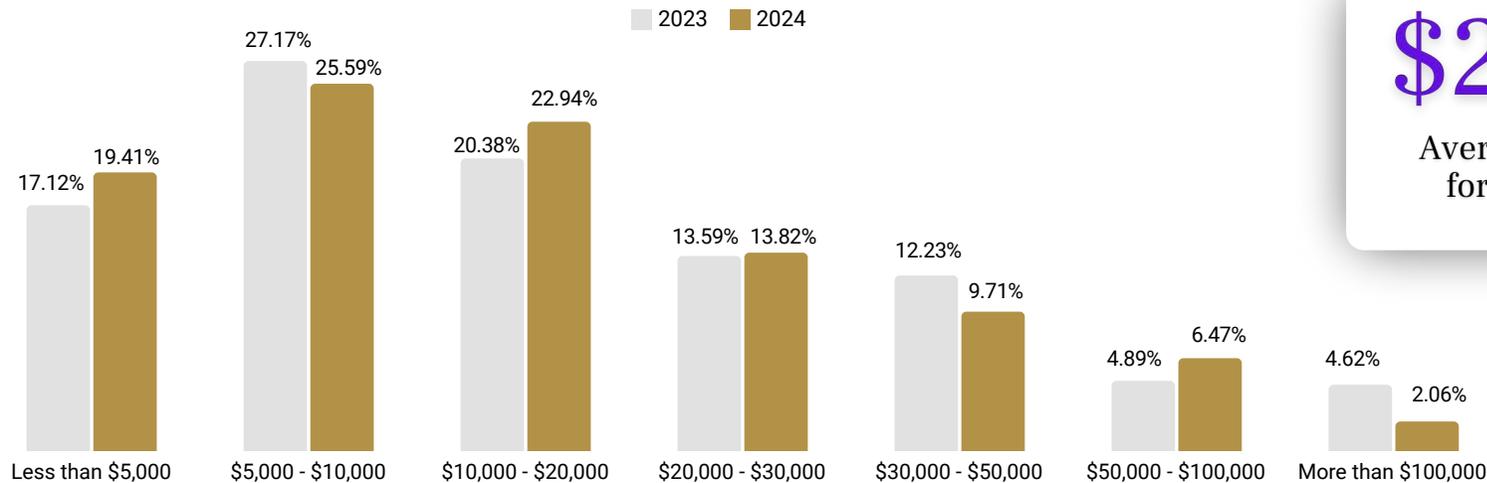


What are event organizers' budgets for booking speakers in 2024?

In the speaking industry, the importance of budget can't be overstated, so let's dive in. For overall budgets in 2024, the most common range (**46.47%**) was \$10,000 to \$50,000. **45%** of event strategists said their average budget for hiring a keynote speaker was less than \$10,000. Only **8.53%** of respondents said their budget was more than \$50,000.



Event organizers' budget for booking speakers in 2024 vs. 2023:



\$22,449

Average overall budget for hiring a speaker

What about speaking fees this year?

To balance out our deep dive into the financial side of speaker booking, we asked speakers about their fees in 2024. More than 40% (**41.01%**) had fee ranges over **\$10,000**, while **3.44%** of speakers who responded had fee ranges **greater than \$30,000**. Most speakers (**60.05%**) said that total audience size does not influence their fees, with **39.31%** saying it does.

VIRTUAL

85.39%

of respondents said their speaking fees are within the range of **\$5,000 - \$20,000 for a virtual event.**

IN PERSON

69.04%

of respondents said their speaking fees are within the range of **\$5,000 - \$20,000 for an in-person event.**



81.20%

of experienced speakers said **travel costs are not included** in their fees.

\$13,978

Average speaking fee reported from highly-experienced speakers

A note on fees: In 2024, this year's survey received more than 3x the number of speakers responding compared to speaker respondents in 2023. This should be considered while evaluating data.

BONUS PRO TIP FOR SPEAKERS:

For additional insight into speaker fees and advice for speakers who run their own thought leadership businesses, visit our friends at SpeakerFlow.com.

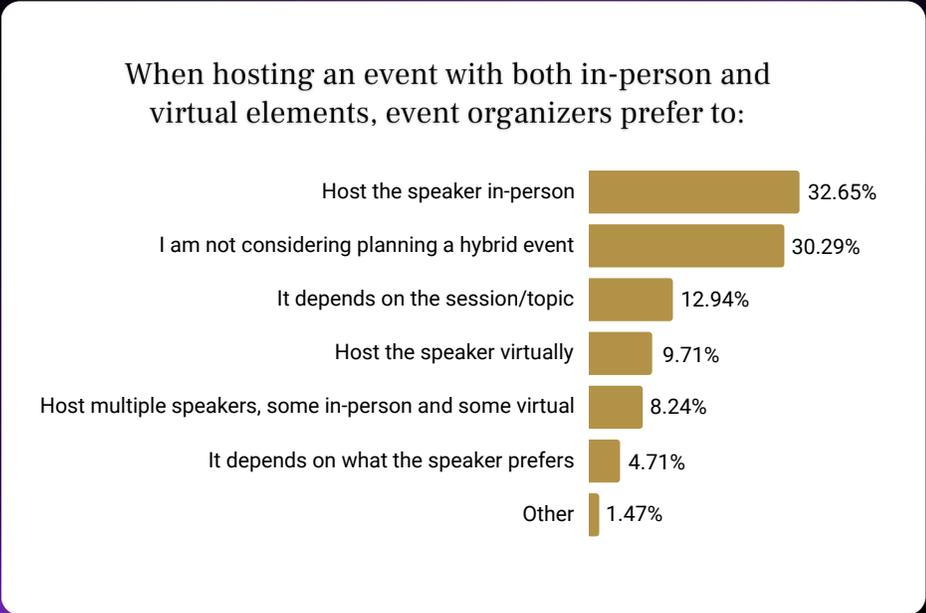
SPEAKERFLOW

What’s the right length for virtual and in-person presentations?

Event format impacts what event organizers see as the right length of time for a speaker to present, while speakers have their own preferences on presentation length. For in-person or hybrid events, the highest percentage of respondents (47.65%) said that the right length of time for a speaker’s presentation is 45 minutes to an hour. Next was 30 to 45 minutes at 31.47%, and 2.45% said over an hour. For virtual events, the highest percentage of respondents (36.18%) said that the right length of time for a speaker’s presentation is 30 to 45 minutes, while 26.18% said 15 to 30 minutes.

Preferred speech length:

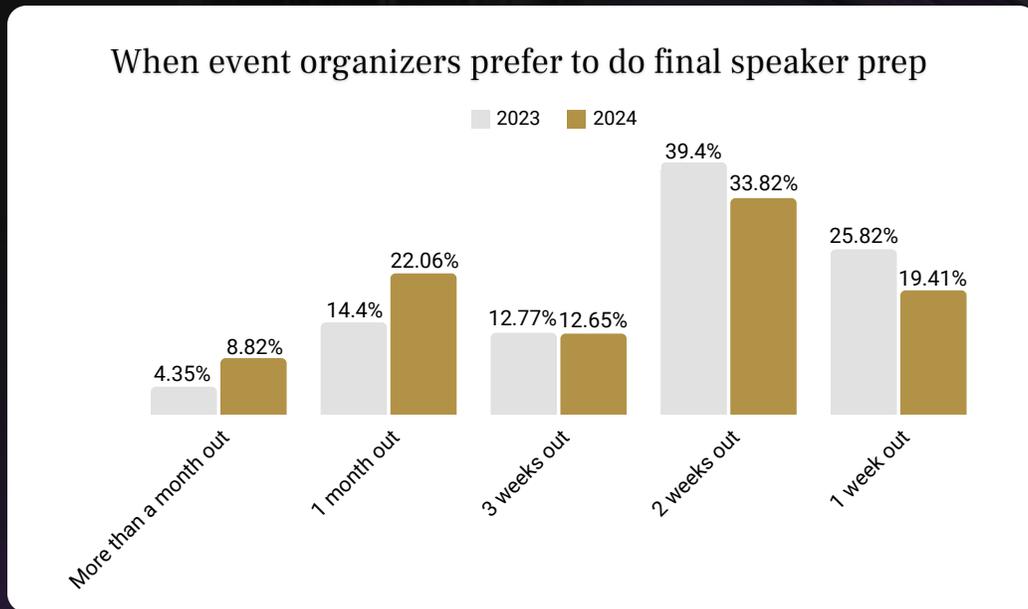
In-person events	Virtual events
45 min - 1 hr	30 - 45 min
(47.65 %)	(36.18 %)



When do event organizers do final prep?

As the date of the event approaches, most event organizers (**53.23%**) are running through final preparations with speakers in the **last two weeks** before the event.

There was a notable increase in the length of time some event organizers plan to hold speaker prep calls. In 2024, **over 30%** are planning to hold their final speaker prep calls **a month or more in advance**. In 2023, this was less than 19% of respondents.



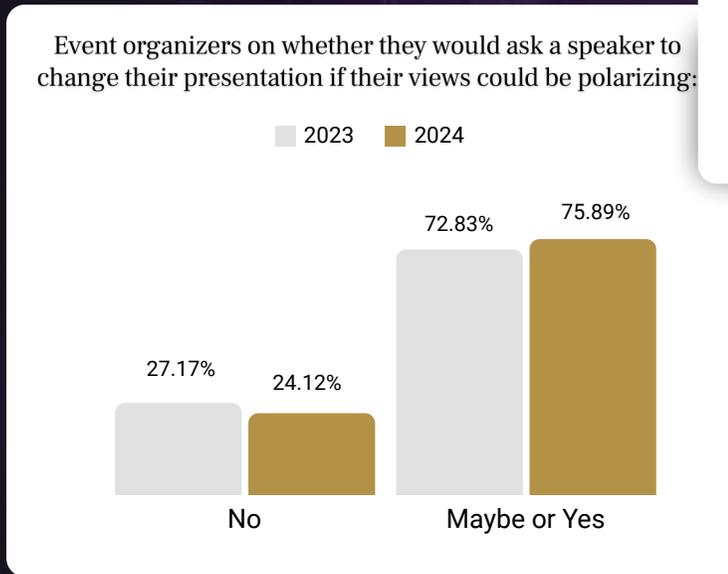
What other activities do event organizers ask of speakers?

When seeking to maximize engagement with speakers, organizers will ask for additional requests at the time of securing talent for their event. The top request that event organizers said they typically have for speakers beyond their presentations were **meet and greets with attendees** (**52.94%**).

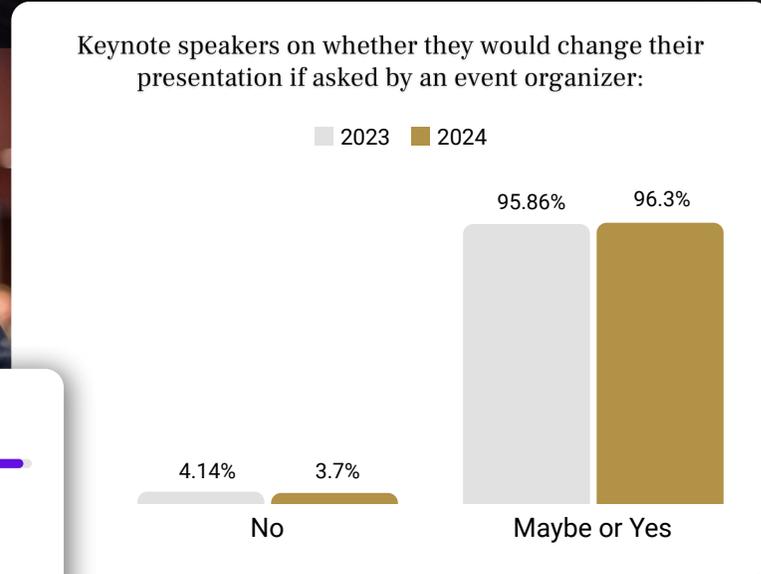


How do event organizers and speakers approach controversial topics?

To get a sense of how both parties might approach potentially controversial content in 2024, we asked event organizers how likely they would be to ask a keynote speaker to change their presentation if they thought their views could be polarizing. The overwhelming majority (75.89%) said they **would at least consider it**. Only 27.17% said they **wouldn't do it**. Next, we asked keynote speakers how likely they would be to oblige such a request from an event organizer. Almost all (96.3%) said they **would at least consider** changing their presentation in such a scenario. Only 4.14% said they wouldn't do it.



75.89%
Would ask speaker to change their presentation

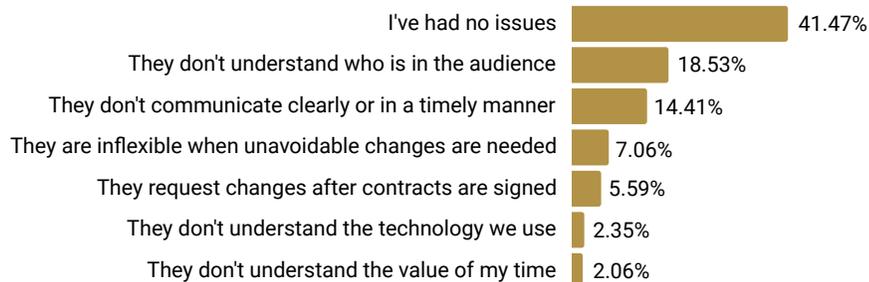


96.3%
Would consider changing a presentation if asked

Event organizers and speakers: biggest challenges of working together?

Like any working relationship, event organizers and speakers may come across challenges as they work together to deliver memorable event experiences. On a positive note, the top response from event organizers (41.47%) and keynote speakers (40.48%) was that **they've had no issues at all** working with each other. The top challenges listed by event organizers were speakers not having an understanding of their audience (18.53%), not communicating clearly or in a timely manner (15.18%), not being flexible enough when unavoidable changes come up (10.21%), or requesting changes after contracts are signed (8.64%).

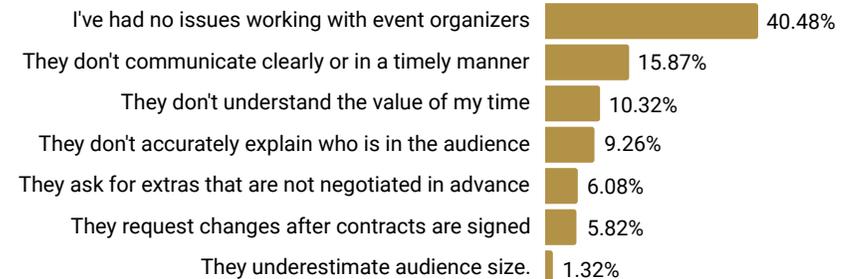
Event organizers' biggest pain points working with keynote speakers:



Tips for keynote speakers:

1. Ask questions about audience demographics and interests
2. Be responsive
3. Be as flexible as possible
4. Work out all details before signing contract

Keynote speakers biggest pain points working with event organizers

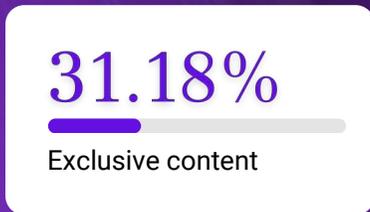


Tips for event organizers:

1. Be respectful of a speaker's time
2. Negotiate extras up front
3. Be responsive
4. Give as much detail as you can about audience demographics and interests

How do event organizers build community among attendees?

Maintaining connections with and between your attendees beyond your events is a top priority in 2024. The most common tools event organizers are employing to accomplish this are **newsletters, exclusive networking opportunities, social media groups, access to exclusive content**, mobile app engagement, and having dedicated staff members for community.

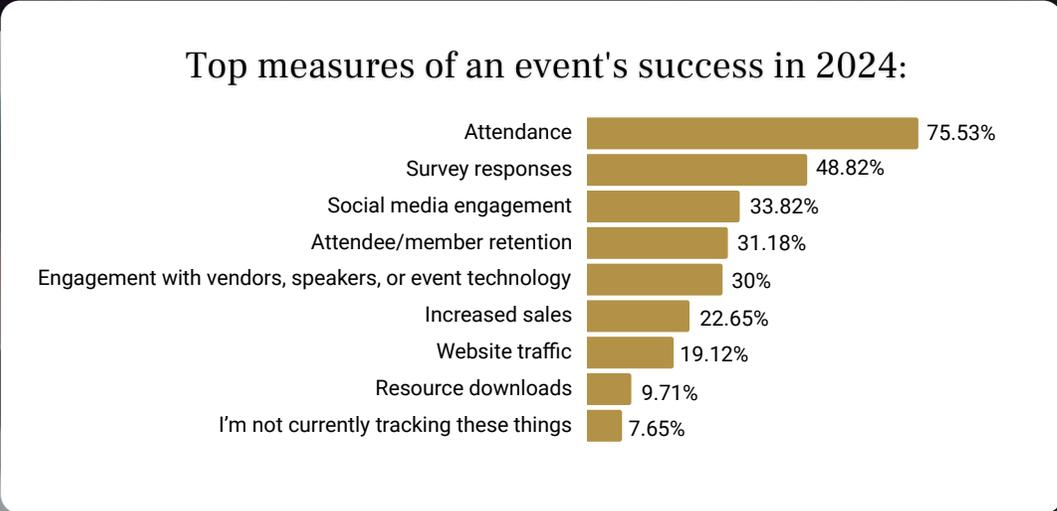
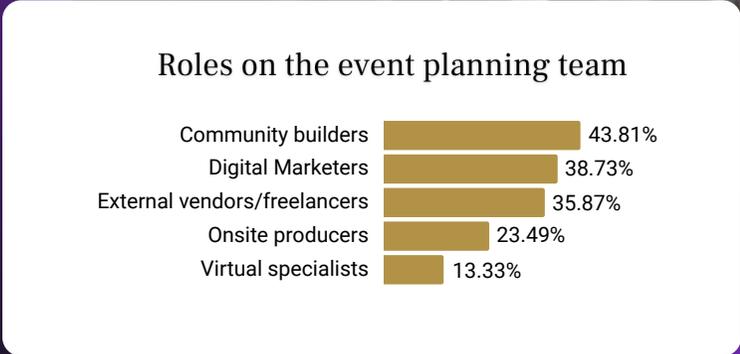


How event organizers build community with their attendees:



How do event organizers measure event success?

Successful event organizers know that measuring the outcome of your events is essential, and it starts at the beginning of planning an event. We know every event is unique, which is why event organizers should identify key performance indicators that are tailored to align with their overall event goals. Now that almost 80% of events are expected to be in person in 2024, it's no surprise that **attendance** has taken the top response in this year's survey. The **top five key performance indicators that event organizers use** to measure the success of their events are attendance, survey responses, social media engagement, attendee retention, and engagement with vendors, speakers, or event technology.



75.53%
 Measure success by **attendance**

What are the most challenging parts of being a keynote speaker?

While the most experienced of speakers make it look easy, being a professional speaker is hard work. When asked about the most challenging parts of the job, nearly two-thirds (66.4%) of speakers said it was finding speaking opportunities, a notable increase over the same response in 2023. Other top answers were travel (30.69%) and negotiating fees (29.37%).



The most challenging parts of being a keynote speaker are:



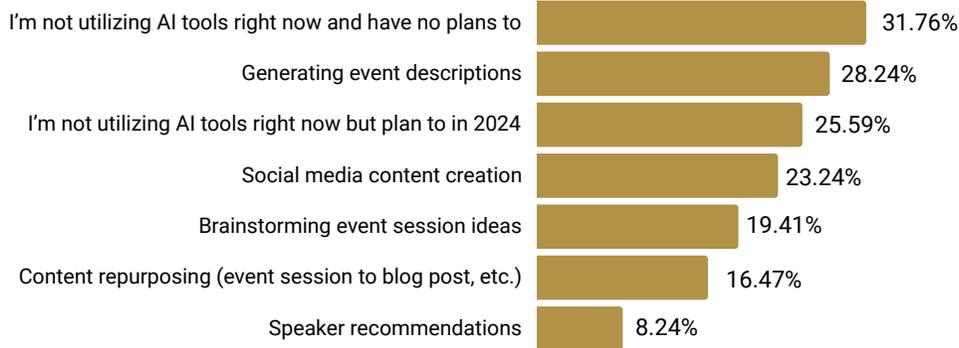
HARDER TO FIND SPEAKING GIGS



How are event organizers utilizing AI tools in the event planning process?

AI tools are changing the way we do business across all fields and disciplines, and the speaking industry is no exception. To get a deeper understanding of how prevalent AI tools have become in the speaker booking process in 2024, we asked event organizers which tools they're currently using, and how they're finding them helpful in their roles. **The top AI tools event organizers are using in 2024 are ChatGPT (88.28%) and Google Gemini (16.55%).** The top three ways they're using these tools are **generating event descriptions, social media content creation, and brainstorming event session ideas.**

Event organizers on how they're using AI tools in their roles today:



42.65%

of event organizers said they are utilizing AI tools.

88.28%

of event organizers who use AI tools said they use ChatGPT.

Predictions event organizers and keynote speakers have in 2024

Event organizers' predictions:

"There are a lot of events out there, and their relevance must be clearly communicated. What's the **benefit for the audience is more important than ever.**"

"**Continued focus on DEI** since DEI is under attack and/but corporate budgets for ERG will be lower than previous years."

"**AI will be THE topic** that will drive engagement. Hiring the right speakers to discuss AI for a lay audience will be challenging."

"**AI is going to start having a significant impact** on the event management and speaking industry."

"More **hands-on activity type events**, not just lectures. Interactive and engaging speakers who want to provide small group advice and mentorship. Higher prices."

"**Politics and the economy** will be at the forefront of concerns that organizations will ask to be addressed by speakers."

"Slight **growth over last year** - excitement and energy continuing!"

"People seem to prefer coming **in person**; however, **travel budgets** are making us prioritize which events that we attend."

Keynote speakers' predictions:

"2024 is going to be an amazing year for speakers. Because of AI, how we **authentically show up as human beings will matter more.** Meeting and event professionals will want to see how we are thought leaders."

"2024 will be very busy for **speakers of color** and members of the **LGBTQIA community.**"

"A **steady and more predictable growth** year than past years of uncertainty."

"**AI will cause a flood of content**, and clients will find it harder to choose who REALLY is an expert."

"Challenges of **global conflict, a troubling U.S. election cycle**; growing impacts of climate change and shifting demographics."

"**Diversity and inclusion** will not only be important topics to cover, they will become important in **speaker selection.**"

"Meetings and **conferences will increase** along with budget size."

"People will be looking for **speakers that provide connections** and relationships with each other"

Keynote speakers share thoughts and advice with their peers

Advice for their peers:

"Your **personal brand is your most valuable asset** as a professional speaker. It's what sets you apart from others and makes you memorable to your audience."

"**Know your audience.** It's not about what you know. It's about them and what they need. It's also not enough to give facts or tips. You need to keep the audience's emotional journey in mind. Where they are at emotionally when they walk through the ballroom door, to where you want to leave them when they walk out - emotionally and mentally. Facts and boring stats don't do that."

"It's a long journey, so you have to really commit to it, work, hard, **be persistent, and resilient.**"

"Focus on **showing up authentically with a clear solution** to a strong pain point of your ideal client. Hone in on your unique perspective and use it to add a new approach to the conversation."

"**Ensure your speech is an experience for the audience.** If the audience is only an observer of your presentation, you won't be memorable. If you provide an experience, they'll never forget you - hence referrals come easily."

"Always be **reading and learning and sharpening your conversational skills** and education. It can only help you stay at the top of your game."

Why they chose to pursue this career:

"A great speaker can be truly motivational. I choose to be **truly motivational.**"

"As a professional speaker, I have the **opportunity to influence and inspire** individuals and organizations. I find it incredibly rewarding to see how my insights can **empower others** to make positive changes in their lives or businesses."

"As a thought leader I'm very **passionate about sharing my topic** and as a violinist, I'm very **passionate about performing.**"

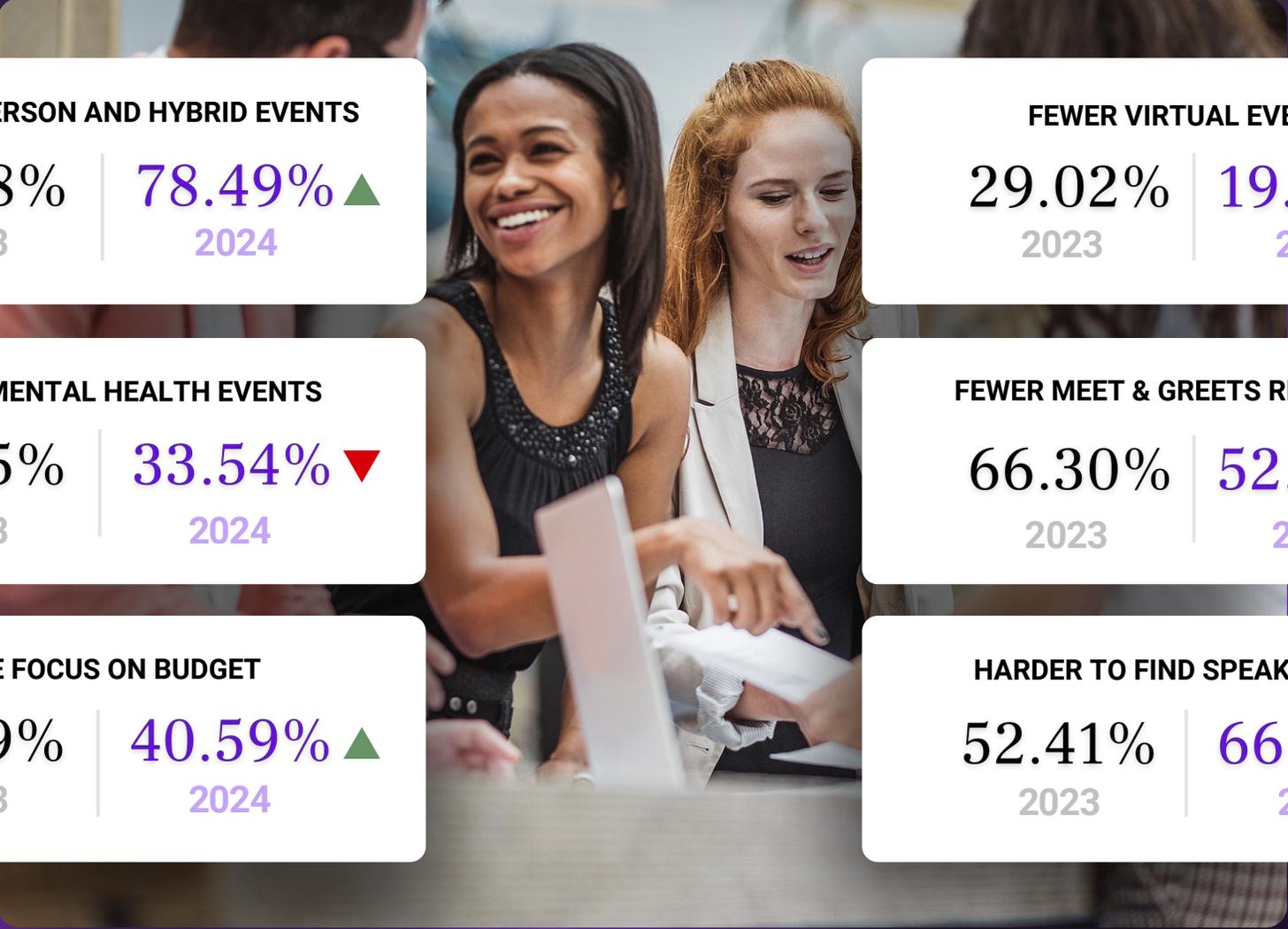
"Being able to provide individuals with training and development that **enhances their careers.**"

"**Flexibility, variety of clients, seeing the impact** across a broad range of sectors."

"**Helping others to navigate and apply** relevant and effective ideas to their professional and day-to-day lives."

"I **enjoy sharing my experiences with others** so they can learn from my successes and mistakes."

"I **enjoy the art of using words to paint pictures** that help people understand concepts better. I like to use my story to **encourage others.**"



MORE IN-PERSON AND HYBRID EVENTS

70.98%	78.49% ▲
2023	2024

FEWER VIRTUAL EVENTS

29.02%	19.49% ▼
2023	2024

FEWER MENTAL HEALTH EVENTS

43.75%	33.54% ▼
2023	2024

FEWER MEET & GREETINGS REQUESTED

66.30%	52.94% ▼
2023	2024

MORE FOCUS ON BUDGET

31.79%	40.59% ▲
2023	2024

HARDER TO FIND SPEAKING GIGS

52.41%	66.40% ▲
2023	2024



AAE Speakers Bureau is a full-service speakers bureau and talent agency that exclusively represents the interests of meeting and event professionals to select, book and execute events with keynote speakers and entertainment to leave a lasting impact on their audiences. We work tirelessly for event professionals as their centralized, trusted, and impartial partner in the talent booking process.

With our expansive industry experience and exceptional customer support, AAE has connected more than 10,000 events with their perfect speaker, host, celebrity, or performer since 2002. We have booked over \$300M of celebrity talent on behalf of thousands of the most respected companies and organizations in the world.

If you have any questions related to this report, please contact Jennifer Best or Evan Owens at jennifer@aaehq.com and evan@aaehq.com, respectively.

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