



The Reconnection Report

Planner**Pulse** | Fall 2026

At Encore, we've helped build the resurgence of live events and experiences. As a result, we know what it takes to meaningfully reconnect. **Connection, personalization and innovation** have all been key drivers that infuse events with meaning. These elements work together to produce the active attention stakeholders want of their audiences, and the experiences audiences want to spend time being a part of.



In *The Reconnection Report*, we're sharing what you've shared with us: how connection, personalization and innovation play a part in making your events successful. We've collected responses from event professionals across the industry who share what's working, point to what isn't and where there are opportunities to make these strategies a priority.

Connection is the number one priority. Crafting events to empower reconnection – and help people stay connected – **is the ultimate goal.**



Bizzabo, "The Event Industry's Top Marketing Statistics, Trends, and Benchmarks for 2026"



Employee Connections Study via Ingenuity Design



Forbes Insights, "Business Meetings: The Case for Face-to-Face"

Connection

Connection emerged as the top priority of planners from our most recent Planner Pulse research.

The rankings suggest that planners see personalization and innovation as powerful tools that help people participate more fully and build relationships through the event experience.

What's Important to You

When planners were asked to rank connection, personalization and innovation by importance to the participant experience, nearly 6 in 10 planners ranked connection as the most important event priority, ahead of personalization and innovation.

That distinction matters. Planners described connection as:

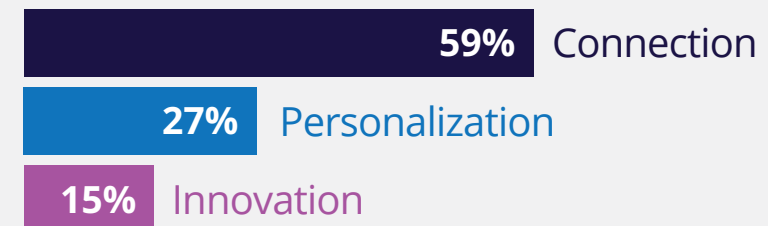
- Meaningful engagement and participation.
- Networking and relationship building.
- Belonging, inclusion and feeling valued.
- Purpose, content, the participant journey and the kind of experiences people remember after the event ends.

In other words, the event itself is only the starting point.

Connection happens when audiences have reasons to engage, are offered ways to participate and receive opportunities to see themselves in the experience. It is built through the content they consume, the people they meet, the choices they make and the moments that help them feel part of something larger than the agenda.



Connection Rankings



6 in 10 

planners ranked connection as the most important event priority, ahead of personalization and innovation.



Designing for Connection

Planners are already designing with that intent. On average, event professionals are using at least 6 tactics per event to promote connection. The most common tactics include panels at 67%, unstructured peer networking at 59%, interactive sessions at 56% and smaller breakout groups at 55%.

These tactics point to a clear pattern: **Planners are creating connection through participation, proximity and shared experience.** Panels bring multiple perspectives into the room. Peer networking creates space for relationships to form more naturally. Interactive sessions invite participants to contribute rather than consume. Breakout

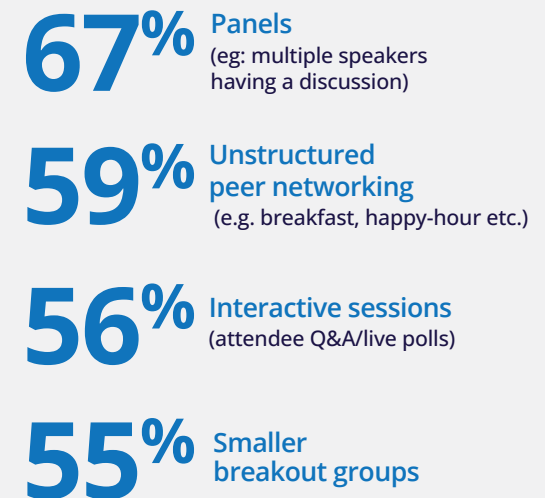
groups offer smaller environments where conversation can become more focused, relevant and personal.

But the data also suggests that connection is not achieved by adding tactics alone. Planners shared that the experience has to be intentional:

- A panel needs a point of view
- Networking moments need the right environment
- Interactive sessions need reasons for participants to participate.

The best connection strategies are not just included in the agenda. Rather, they are designed into the participant journey.

Most Common Tactics to promote connection



Personalization Makes Connection Feel Relevant

If connection is the goal, personalization is one of the methods event professionals are already using to achieve it.

Our respondents shared that they define personalization by a deep knowledge of participants, including their interests, preferences, needs and motivations. Planners described it as tailoring the experience to participant needs, planning with the audience in mind and giving participants more choice in shaping their experience. Personalization makes content, communications, sessions and interactions feel more relevant to the people in the room.

Personalization as a Priority

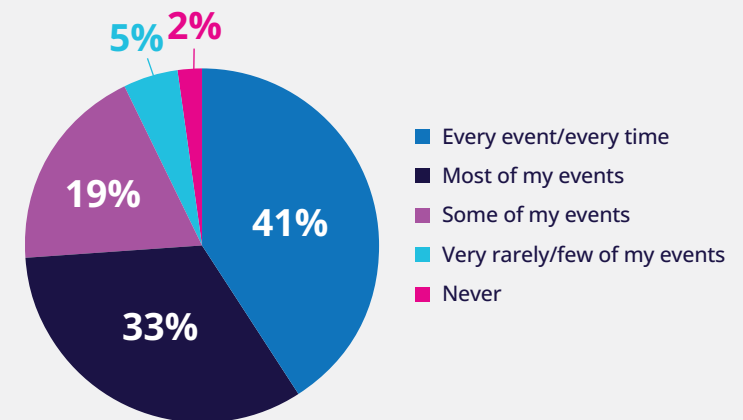
Planners are already prioritizing this work. Nearly 3 in 4 planners personalize every or most of their events, while only 2% say they never personalize.



The most common approaches to personalization start with listening. Planners said they collect participant feedback through post-event evaluations, begin with event goals and stakeholder objectives and use registration, demographic and historical data to better understand what participants need.



Frequency of Event Personalization



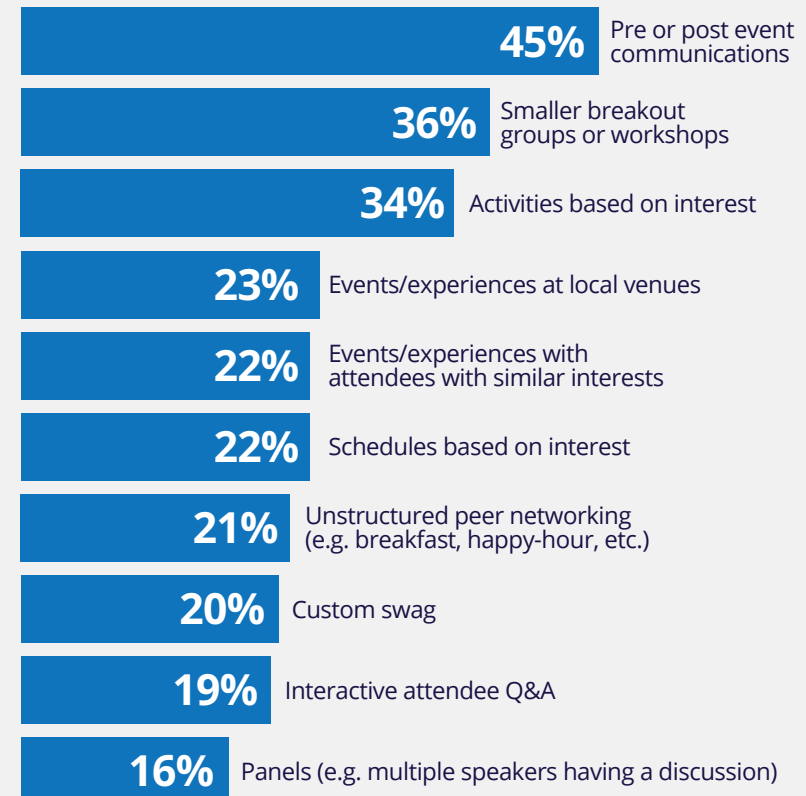
Personalized Touchpoints: What Matters and When

The research also shows where planners believe personalization matters most. Pre- or post-event communications ranked highest at 45%, followed by smaller breakout groups or workshops at 36% and activities based on interest at 34%.

This reinforces an important point: Personalization does not have to begin with a complex technology solution, but rather, with better insight. When planners understand who is attending, why they want to be there and what success looks like for the registrant, they can make smarter decisions across the experience, from communications and session design to participant journeys and post-event follow-up.

That prioritization reflects the full arc of the participant journey. Personalization opportunities extend beyond what happens on-site and shape how participants are invited in, how they navigate the event and how the experience continues afterward. Personalized communications can help participants understand what is most relevant to them. Breakouts and workshops can encourage connection between people with shared needs or goals. Interest-based activities can make networking feel more natural and less forced.

Important Areas to Personalize



Additional areas to potentially personalize include high-tech/visual displays, resources based on needs (DEIB focus) and roundtables.

The Breakout: Make It Personal

Breakout rooms are a strong example of personalization and connection working together. 4 in 5 planners agree breakout rooms are effective at building connection, but only about 55% currently use smaller breakout groups as a connection tactic.

That gap is worth paying attention to. Planners recognize the value of smaller, more focused gatherings, but execution can make or break the experience.

The research shows that breakout rooms can create more meaningful exchanges, easier introductions, stronger connections and

better opportunities for brainstorming and problem-solving. It also shows that they require clear planning, defined objectives and often moderators or facilitators to work well.

A breakout room is most effective when it has:

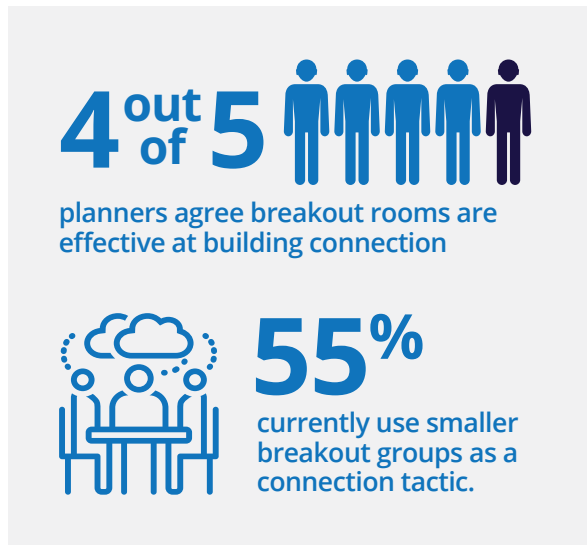
- Clear purpose
- Strong prompt
- Right mix of participants
- Thoughtful facilitation
- Tie-back to the main event

Reasons breakouts fall short include:

- Lack of purpose or structure
- Poor facilitation
- Uneven participation
- Poor participant matching
- Logistics and time constraints
- Disconnection for the overall event

✓ THE TAKEAWAY:

Smaller does not automatically mean more connected. With the right combination of elements, the breakout session can become one of the most valuable connection points in the experience.



Innovation Works Best When It Serves the Experience

Innovation also plays an important role in the reconnection story, but the research makes one thing clear: Planners define innovation by what it helps accomplish.

Innovation in Your Words

When asked what innovation means at events, planners shared multiple definitions: purposeful improvement — not novelty; fresh ideas, formats and experiences; technology and AI enablement; enhancing attendee engagement; continuous evolution and experimentation; creating memorable, differentiated experiences; audience-centered innovation; creative event design; operational efficiency; keeping pace with industry standards.

That framing is important. Innovation is the solution that creates relevance and ease, encourages interaction and helps planners understand and improve the participant experience. It's clear that it is not simply the newest tool, screen or platform alone but instead, it's most valuable when it is felt in the quality of the experience, not just seen as a feature in the room.

Planners most commonly associated innovation with techniques or solutions that allow them to personalize events at 64%, tools or technology that reduce work or stress at 63% and new event design layouts at 62%.

These findings connect innovation directly back to the planner's need to create more relevant

experiences, purposeful events and reduce planning friction.

Innovation Associations

64% Techniques or solutions that allow them to personalize events

63% Tools or technology that reduce work or stress

62% New event design layouts

What Innovation at Events Means to Event Planners



Innovative Solutions for Crafting Connection

Planners also named recent solutions that are helping improve processes and increase engagement, including mobile apps, QR codes, AI, digital check-in, automated communication, segmented communications, member matching, customized agendas, polling, Q&A, workshops, networking, gamification, surveys, registration insights, engagement analytics and AI-powered reporting.

These are drivers of connection:

- Digital check-in can make arrival feel smoother.
- Personalized communication can help participants discover what matters to them.
- Polling and Q&A can turn passive listening into participation.
- Engagement analytics can help planners make better decisions before, during and after the event.

The strongest innovations remove barriers to human connection.

Together, those solutions show innovation operating in four practical ways

1



Reduced Friction

- Mobile apps
- QR codes
- AI
- Digital check-in
- Automated communications etc.

2



Increase Personalization

- Segmented communications
- Attendee matching
- Customized agendas
- AI recommendations

3



Create Interaction

- Polling
- Q&A
- Workshops
- Networking
- Gamification
- Storytelling

4



Use Data Continuously

- Surveys
- Registration insights
- Engagement analytics
- AI-powered reporting

The Barriers to Connection

While the research shows strong intent around connection, personalization and innovation, it also highlights the gap between what planners value and what they can realistically execute.

The Limitations of Connecting

Cost and budget limitations are the top barrier to creating participant connection at 57%. Not enough time in the event agenda follows at 45%. Other barriers include getting participants to engage with the event as a whole at 28%, getting people to engage with each other at 27% and lack of personalization at 23%.

These barriers help explain why some high-value tactics are not adopted as widely as planners believe they should be, like breakout sessions. Eight in 10 planners agree breakout rooms are effective for building connection, yet only about 55% currently utilize breakout groups to do so.

8 out of 10
planners agree breakout
rooms are effective for
building connection



yet only
55%
currently utilize
breakout groups
to do so

From an operational standpoint, breakouts face the pressure of real-world constraints. Breakout rooms require space, structure, time, staffing, facilitation and alignment to event goals. When budgets are tight and agendas are full, the tactics that require more design discipline can become harder to prioritize, even when planners understand their value.



Top Barriers to Event Participant Connection



Additional barriers also included lack of knowledge around best practices, leadership support and vendor support.

The Innovation Ceiling

The innovation gap is even more pronounced. Cost and budget are the top barrier to innovation at 85%, followed by the learning curve at 40%, time required to research new solutions at 39% and lack of knowledge about what to use or what is best at 36%.

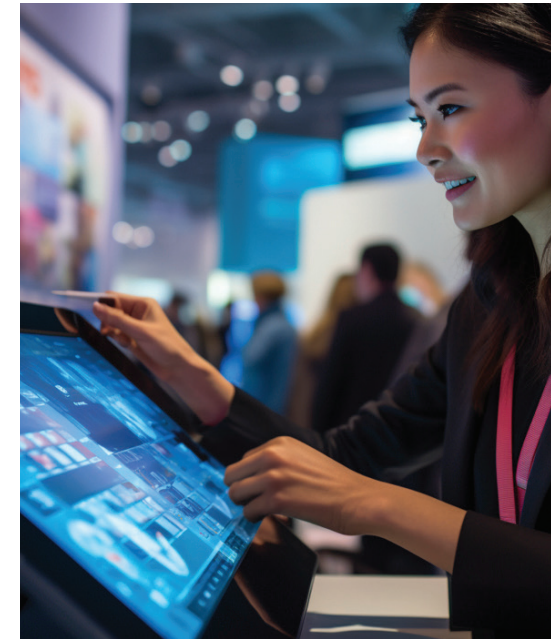
This reinforces that planners are not resistant to innovation. They are navigating the cost, time, knowledge and resource burden that often comes with it. They need solutions that are creative and practical. They need ideas that can scale, fit within their constraints and clearly connect back to participant value.

When planners were asked about persistent problems they wish had better solutions, budget and rising costs rose to the top, along with participant engagement, fragmented

planning systems, registration and attendance, communication challenges, AV and technology reliability, data and analytics, networking, operational coordination, vendor management, scheduling and accessibility.

The pattern is clear: look for ways to make the experience better without making the process harder. They want more transparent costs, stronger engagement, more integrated planning tools, better forecasting, smarter participant messaging and dependable infrastructure.

Planners know what matters, they know connection is the goal and they know personalization makes experiences more meaningful. They know innovation can help them execute with greater impact. But they are also working within limits that can make even strong ideas difficult to implement.



Barriers to Innovation

85% Cost/Budget

40% Learning Curve
(time it takes to become familiar)

39% Time it takes to research new solutions

36% Lack of knowledge of what to use or what is best

Theme	Mention Frequency	Typical Need
Budget & rising costs	◆◆◆◆◆	Lower, more transparent costs
Attendee engagement	◆◆◆◆◆	Personalization and interaction
Fragmented planning systems	◆◆◆◆	Integrated event management platform
Registration & attendance	◆◆◆◆	Better forecasting and automation
Communication challenges	◆◆◆◆	Smarter attendee messaging
AV & technology reliability	◆◆◆◆	Dependable infrastructure and support
Data & analytics	◆◆◆	AI-driven insights and reporting
Networking	◆◆◆	Intelligent matchmaking
Operational coordination	◆◆◆	Workflow automation
Vendor management	◆◆◆	Consistent service and transparency
Scheduling & agenda management	◆◆◆	Dynamic scheduling tools
Accessibility & inclusion	◆◆	More inclusive event experiences

From Isolation to Reconnection

It's essential to turn the tension event professionals face into actionable items that can move the needle on creating more connected experiences. Budget, limited time and resources are recurrent factors that planners face. The research points to practical ways planners can keep improving the participant experience while keeping sight of what matters most.

Begin with connection. Before adding another format, feature or tool, identify what kind of connection the event is meant to create. Is the goal relationship-building? Shared learning? Belonging? Collaboration? Long-term engagement? Defining the connection goal first helps every other decision become more focused.

Next, personalization makes connection more relevant. The research shows that planners already rely on surveys, event goals, stakeholder objectives, registration data, demographics and historical insights to understand participant needs. Those inputs can shape communications, session recommendations, breakout design, networking moments and follow-up.

A strong breakout needs a clear purpose, a useful prompt, thoughtful facilitation, right-sized and well-matched groups and a tie-back to the main event. The research shows planners see breakouts as effective, but also points to facilitation, purpose, matching, logistics, timing and cohesion as common issues to solve for.

Innovation with Personalization in Mind

They also point to mobile apps, QR codes, AI, digital check-in, automated communications, polling, Q&A, participant matching, engagement analytics and AI-powered reporting as solutions that can improve outcomes. **Use innovation where it can support personalization, create interaction and ease or help measure what is working.** Planners associate innovation most

strongly with personalization techniques, tools that reduce work or stress and new event design layouts.

Most importantly, make innovation feel useful instead of decorative. The research defines innovation as purposeful improvement, fresh thinking, technology enablement and better engagement. The best innovations should make the event easier to navigate, more relevant to attend, more engaging to participate in and easier to continue learning afterward.

Meaningful reconnection takes design, insight, intention and practical execution. It takes personalization that helps participants feel seen. It takes innovation that solves real problems. And it takes connection — and reconnection — as the measure of whether the experience worked.

Innovation with Personalization in Mind	
Mobile apps	QR codes
AI	Digital check-in
Automated communications	Polling
Q&A	Participant matching
Engagement analytics	AI-powered reporting



Looking for more innovative ways to leverage event trends? We'd love to partner with you on your next event. We bring decades of expertise, personalized service and fresh ideas to the table. Wherever your events take you, Encore is there to provide production, technology and creative support with a smile. No matter the size or scale of your event, we've got your back.

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