



The IRF 2019 Wellness in Meetings and Incentive Travel Study

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Introduction

The IRF’s survey of meeting planners reveals health and wellness practices in meetings fall short of the stated company goals. The majority of respondents (64%) said their meetings are only “somewhat healthy.” Of 26 wellness practices presented in the survey, only two are considered standard: smoke-free facilities and water / reduced-calorie drinks. When these modest ratings are compared to the high enthusiasm expressed by planners and the critical focus planners say their companies place on wellness, a disconnect becomes apparent.

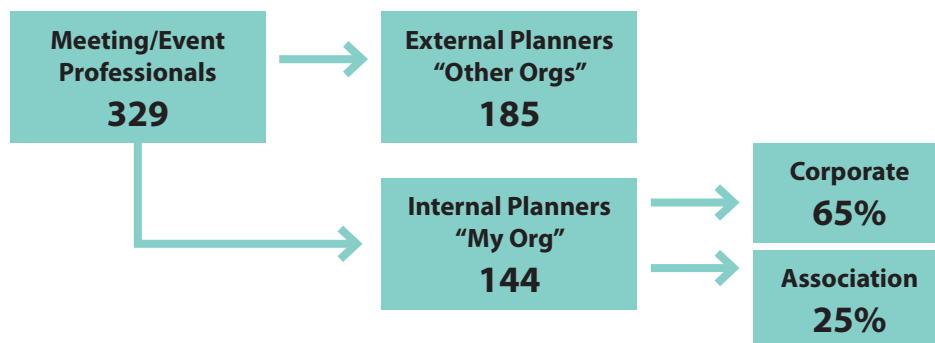
Meetings can be designed to be healthier. Most health and wellness practices have a low impact on the budget. Meeting planners reported that only four of the 26 wellness practices tested would require additional expense big enough to require budget approval. There are several emerging healthy practices, including access to a fitness facility, more movement at meetings, and healthier food served at meals and breaks. Many of these emerging trends should become standard practices as meeting planners continue to merge the concepts of wellness and meetings.

Respondent Profile

The IRF’s web-based survey on the topic of wellness in the meetings and events industry was fielded in December 2018 and January 2019. The survey was distributed to the IRF database, *Prevue Magazine* subscribers, and members of Meeting Professionals International (MPI). The IRF received 329 usable completed surveys from this pool of experienced planners.

- 56% of respondents were *external meeting planners*, such as agencies and third-parties
- External meeting planners were more likely to plan incentive travel (67%)
- 44% of respondents were *internal meeting planners*, working for corporations and associations
- Internal meeting planners were more likely to plan internal business meetings
- More than 60% of respondents had more than 15 years of experience
- 53% of respondents planned eleven or more meetings per year
- Respondents are responsible for many different sizes of meetings, with a quarter having a largest meeting of 100–499 and another quarter having largest meeting of 500–999
- 60% of respondents from agencies planned meetings for 101–2,500 attendees

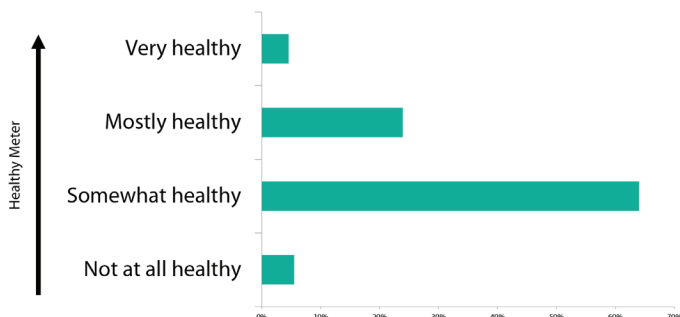
Respondent Profile Overview



Meeting Planners Do Not Consider Their Meetings “Healthy”

When asked how healthy they would rate their meetings, 64% of respondents said their meetings are only “somewhat” healthy. For those who considered their meetings healthier, only 24% reported “mostly” healthy and 5% reported “very healthy.”

How Healthy are Meetings Today?



Respondents reviewed 26 well-established healthy practices established by the [Center for Science in the Public Interest](#). The majority of meeting planners surveyed indicated only two practices were considered standard and used at all meetings:



1. No-smoking facilities (65% planners use at all meetings)
2. Water/low-calorie drinks (51% of planners use at all meetings)

While the current survey only revealed two standard healthy practices, more

are emerging. The advances in health and wellness practices are often driven by the type of meeting. Internal meeting planners are more likely to improve wellness around food and beverage practices, and external planners are making more healthy advances in activities and use of facilities.

High Rates of Personal and Corporate Interest in Health and Wellness

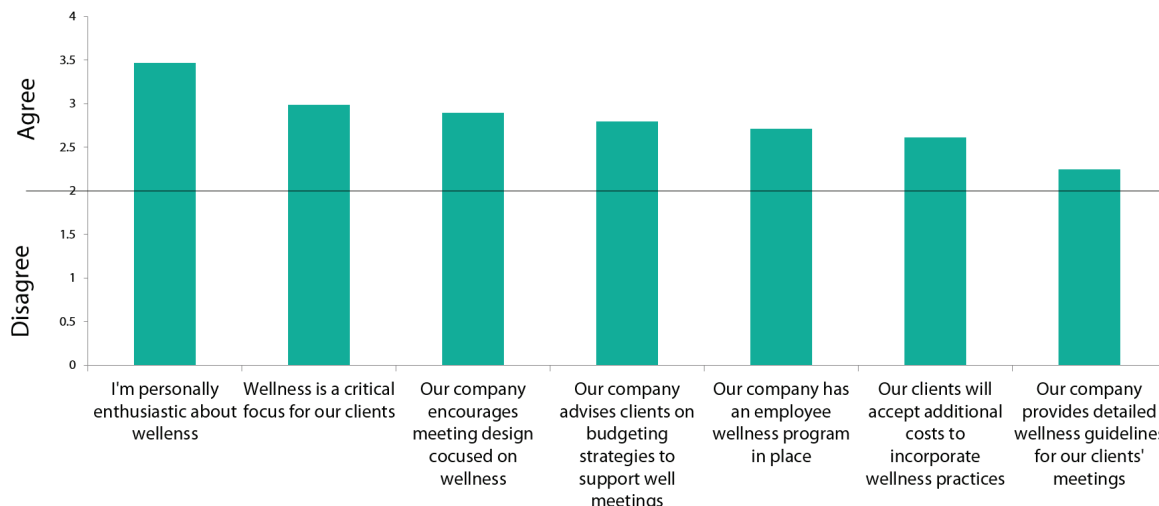
Meeting planners reported high rates of personal enthusiasm for health and wellness in their meetings. Perhaps even more importantly, planners reported that their clients and companies would agree “wellness is a critical focus.” Planners noted that their companies demonstrated this value by having wellness programs in place.

However, there appears to be a disconnect between the stated wellness programs of the company and implementation of the meeting strategy. External planners reported being more successful at implementation than internal planners did.

External planners report that their clients will accept additional costs to incorporate wellness practices into their meetings. In addition, external meeting planners say their companies:

- Encourage them to design with an emphasis on health and wellness
- Provide detailed wellness guidelines for their clients’ meetings
- Advise clients on budgeting strategies to support healthy meetings

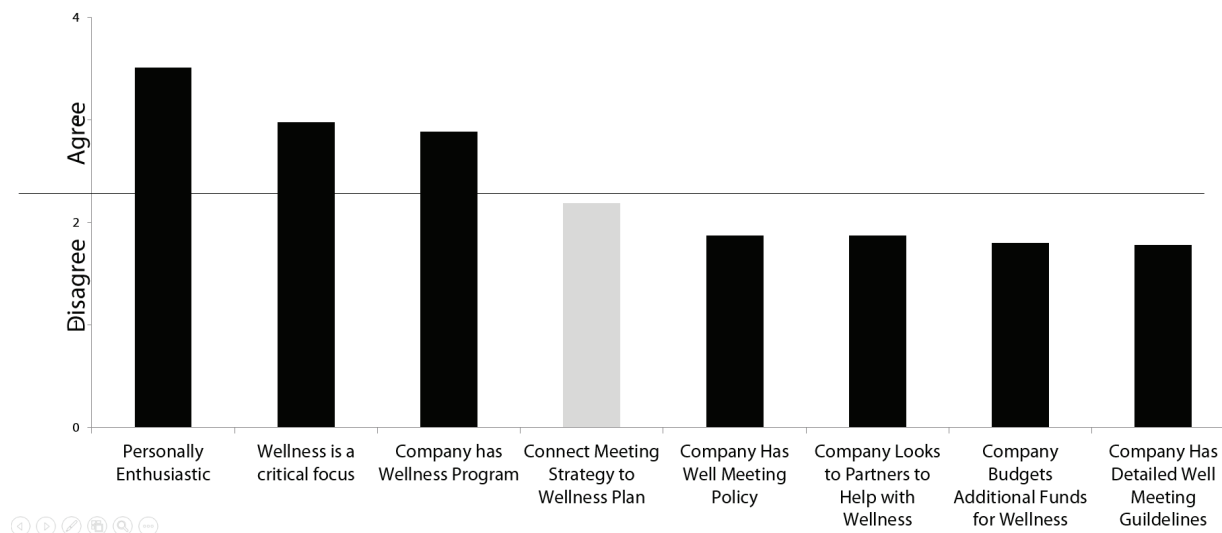
External Meeting Planners' Wellness Ratings



While internal planners report their companies are just beginning to connect their meeting strategy to their wellness plan, they also noted that resources are not fully developed in the following areas:

- Policies requiring meetings to be designed with an emphasis on health and wellness
- Detailed wellness guidelines for meetings
- Budgeting additional funds to support healthy meetings
- Looking to supplier partners for recommended budgeting strategies to support healthy meetings

Internal Meeting Planners Wellness Ratings

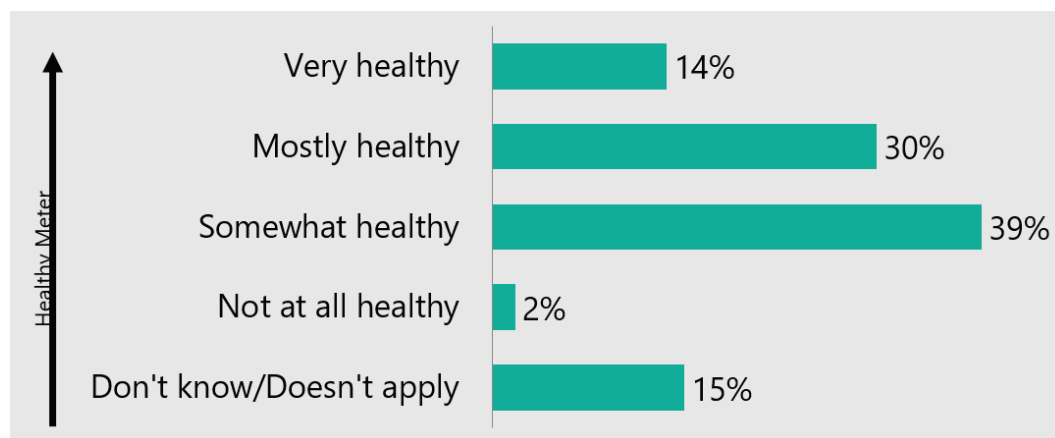


Increased Budget Does Not Make a Big Difference

Increasing budgets seems like an obvious solution to the deficit of healthy meeting practices. But when asked about the impact of additional budget to support health and wellness in meetings, planners reported that meetings would only get slightly healthier than current meetings as reported on page 2.

- Planners reported “very healthy” meetings would increase from 5% to 14%
- “Mostly healthy” meetings would increase from 24% to 30%

If Extra Budget Is Made Available, How Healthy Are Meetings?



Meeting planners reported that few healthy practices would require additional budget approval, and most healthy practices have a low impact on the budget requests.

Specifically, planners reported that only two out of eleven possible food and beverage options would require additional budget approval:

- Organic ingredients
- Nutrition guides for attendees

Of the fifteen healthy options involving activities and facilities, seven would require additional budget approval:

- Speakers on wellness/health
- Non-traditional health activities (e.g., acupuncture, aromatherapy)
- Using a wellness destination (spa, health center, etc.)
- Gamification of fitness (points, Fitbits, etc.)
- Organized group fitness activities
- Creative or artistic experiences
- Free fitness activities (hiking, yoga, etc.)

Meeting planners noted there are *many* healthy options do not require additional budget approval and would have low impact on the expense budget:

- Fish, chicken, or lean meats
- Casual dress code and/or frequent breaks to encourage moving and activity
- Guide to nearby health/fitness resources
- Reduced plate size

- Guide to nearby health/fitness resources
- Healthy snacks of nuts, fruits, vegetables
- Gluten-free options

Emerging Practices: Food & Beverage

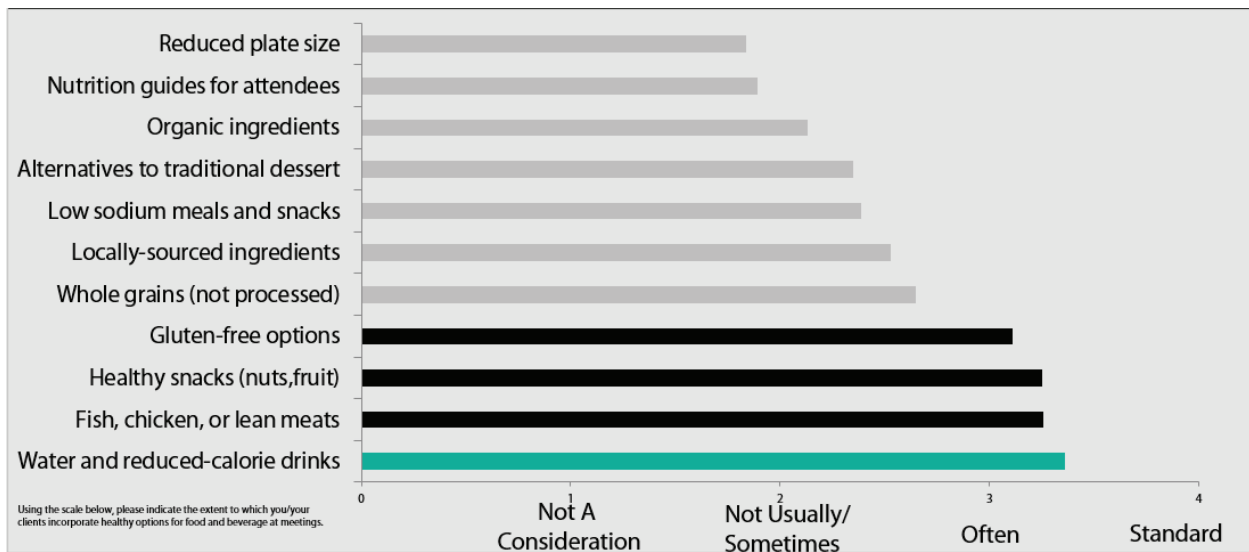
Several healthy practices are “often offered” and meeting planners noted that they prefer to provide them. With water and reduced-calorie drinks standard, the following practices are gaining traction as emerging healthy practices:

- Serving fish, chicken, or lean meats
- Providing healthy snacks (nuts, fruit)
- Offering gluten-free options

Some healthy practices depend on the meeting or audience. The following healthy “pockets of practice” are noteworthy:

- Whole grains
- Locally sourced ingredients
- Low-sodium meals and snacks
- Alternatives to traditional desserts
- Organic ingredients

Implementation of Healthy Food & Beverage Practices



Emerging Practices: Activities & Facilities

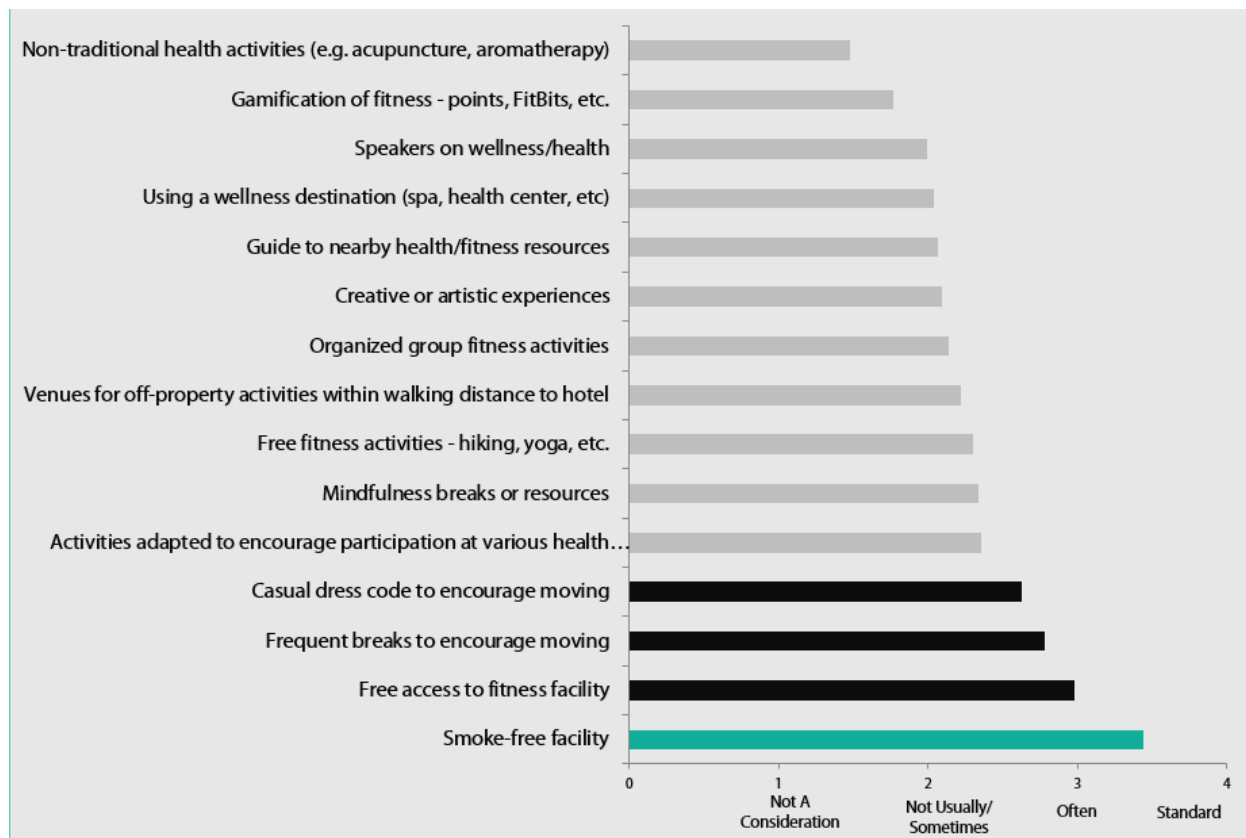
Encouraging fitness and motion were important practices “often offered” that meeting planners also prefer to incorporate. In addition to the now standard practice of using a smoke-free facility, the following healthy practices are emerging:

- Free access to a fitness facility
- Frequent breaks to encourage moving
- Casual dress code to encourage moving

Depending on venue and audience, “pockets of practice” include the following:

- Activities adapted to encourage participation at various health and ability levels
- Mindfulness breaks or resources
- Free fitness activities (e.g., hiking, yoga, etc.)
- Venues for off-property activities within walking distance of hotel

Implementation of Healthy Activities & Facilities Practices



Most Impactful Practices for Health and Wellness in Meetings

More than 200 planners responded to an open-ended question about the most impactful wellness practices in their experience.

Top Recommendations:

Healthy Food and Beverage (recommended by 33% of respondents)

“Spa water...the infused waters are easy to change up per day or throughout the day and are relatively inexpensive as the kitchen always has some herb, fruit or citrus on hand. Guests seem to drink more water when it’s infused versus plain”

Group Exercise (recommended by 25% of respondents)

“Encouraging sunrise exercise before meetings - whether it’s a group class we offer or simply ensuring the hotel fitness center is ready for heavy usage before our meetings begin.”

Effective Practices:

- **Walking Trails:** "Setting up walking 'trails' throughout the convention center"
- **Full View:** "'360 wellness event'- the people just go back home with very good vibes, another chip, and feeling good"
- **Partnering:** "Work with the culinary team to stress importance on attainable healthy menus that are cost effective and will work within a budget"
- **Education:** "Speakers about wellness, then having snacks afterwards that directly pertain to that speaker"
- **Fitness Center:** "Make fitness center available"
- **Gamification:** "Steps/walking competitions"
- **Lighting, Aromatherapy:** "Change in lighting from bright to soft & add aromatherapy in the background... calming or energizing depending upon the need of the event & attending"

Least Impactful Practices for Health and Wellness in Meetings

More than 180 planners responded to an open-ended question about the least impactful wellness practices in their experience.

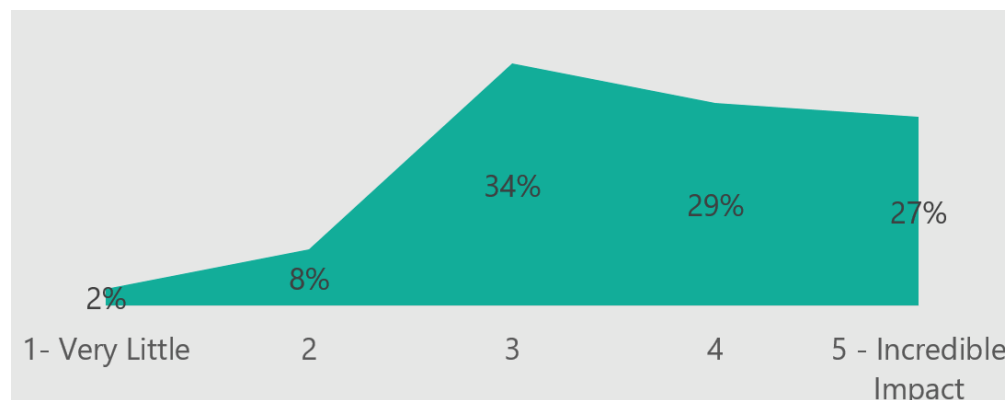
- **Going Too Far With F&B:** e.g Full vegan or meatless menus, no desert, total elimination of sweet snacks
- **Selecting the Wrong Group Exercise:** "Morning Zumba classes aren't nearly as popular for meeting attendees as group runs or yoga"
- **Fitness Classes that Start Too Early:** "Classes that were too early and no one attended"
- **Failed Logistics:** "Daybreak event could have been smoother which was an internal issue"
- **Cramming Agendas:** "Adding an activity for wellness and health has been unsuccessful as the overall agenda the client has is all ready full."
- **Alternative Seating:** "Yoga Ball options as seating"

Health and Wellness Is Important to Meeting Planners' Own Well-Being

Last but certainly not least, meeting planners themselves are stressed. The majority of planners (56%) said the stress of meeting planning has a "strong" or "incredible" impact on their personal life.

To manage the stress and fatigue, meeting planners adopted many healthy practices.

Impact of Meeting Planning on Personal Life



Top Healthy Practices for Meeting Planners

1. **Exercise (50%):** Stick to a standard routine, use hotel gym, explore the destination, walk a lot, practice yoga
2. **Eating Well (37%):** reduce intake of sugar and sodium, bring your own food, have snacks on hand, eat mindfully
3. **Protecting Sleep (25%):** Schedule time to sleep and get as much sleep as possible

Effective Practices:

- **Stay Hydrated/Drink Water:** "Drink more water than you think you need"
- **Have a Routine/Plan Ahead:** "Bring things from home and a reminder to keep up a healthy routine while traveling"
- **Plan for Down Time or Relaxation:** "I always arrive 1 day before ... and book myself a reflexology treatment and likewise - I usually stay one day post to meet with Hotel finance to ensure the billing will be correct by the time it comes to me as well to unwind at the spa"
- **Have a Positive Attitude/Be Mindful:** "Try to focus on the fact that even with small glitches, things will be ok"
- **Meditation:** "Meditation and Soul Mind Body Medicine practices which are based on ancient wisdom and practical techniques from a combination of Western Medicine, Traditional Chinese Medicine, Acupuncture theories, Tao Chi, Qi Gong, Tao Science, Quantum Physics and more which meld science and spirituality."