INTRODUCTION

Any professional working in the global meetings, incentive, conference and exhibition industry should take a moment to read this simple and straightforward summary of an extensive and far-reaching joint report, commissioned by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), ICCA, Meeting Professionals International (MPI) and Reed Travel Exhibitions (RTE).

The report’s recommendations have widespread, universal implications for the industry. It sets out its future advancement and the ongoing success of the industry worldwide.

The full 77-page report is available in hard copy from the UNWTO and also on the websites of ICCA, MPI, EIBTM and RTE.

The group’s Steering Committee will now work in co-operation with industry associations, government agencies, businesses and professionals in order that the recommendations in the report are secured.

This is an ambitious project – but its long-term positive global impact cannot be underestimated. Your urgent comments and views will be welcomed by the partners.

WHAT’S THE PROBLEM?

The industry is simply not recognised as a major economic driver. It deserves better. A great deal better!

But its effectiveness and impact in terms of GDP, jobs and prosperity will never occur unless we have an officially recognised global method for measuring the industry’s importance. The Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) is the most obvious mechanism to use, but it will need modification.
RTE, MPI and ICCA have been working on this issue with the UNWTO, in its capacity as a United Nations Agency, for the past three years. The publication of the report marks the end of the first phase of a plan to secure a major new development for the industry.

Part of the problem has been the fact that the industry simply does not have credible and consistent data. Current measurements are based on many different methods and cannot be compared. What’s more, the small amount of data that is collected is not of a sufficiently high enough quality to meet strict international statistical standards.

The situation is made even worse by the fact that there are many definitions and concepts for the various aspects of the industry. No one has come up with a consensus that everyone can use, every day and in every situation. This must be addressed if the effectiveness and the importance of the industry is to be accepted internationally.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO MEASURE?

There are two types of measurement required if we are to attain a true picture:

- **The supply side** - it is crucial to measure the GDP contribution of the industry. This means measuring income (fees and commissions), costs, value added and employment. In addition to businesses which provide meetings services, it is also important to include other relevant businesses that provide secondary activity such as government agencies and hotels.

- **The demand side** – we need to measure expenditure by industry participants on agreed services supplied by the industry and also other relevant industries. In addition, we need to understand and record the non-monetary aspects of the industry, such as numbers of participants, length of meetings, hotel nights, distance travelled and method of transport.

We could also add a regional dimension to the measurement. In some countries this aspect is critical as the type of meetings may be quite different between regions.

WHO SHOULD COLLECT THIS INFORMATION?

This information should be collected by governments/ government agencies as part of its own annual national statistics data collection process.
It is therefore vital that national meetings industry associations co-operate fully with governments/government agencies by identifying what kinds of data they will require. This should include a list of services provided as well as other industries providing secondary services.

If this is not possible, then the data will need to be collected by the convention bureaux or equivalent.

**WE MUST USE THE SAME WORDS**

The first step identified by the Steering Committee is to recommend the immediate global use of the following definitions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nomenclature for the Industry</td>
<td>Meetings Industry</td>
<td>This name represents the supply side. It has support from key industry participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting Aims</td>
<td>To motivate participants, to conduct business, share ideas, to learn, network and hold discussions</td>
<td>These aims, or similar aims, were the most common in the industry and academic literature</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting Size</td>
<td>Minimum number of ten (10) participants</td>
<td>Many meetings organisations use this number.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting Venue</td>
<td>Venues where there is payment for the use of the venue for meetings</td>
<td>Where there is payment for the use of a contracted venue, there will be an economic contribution to the economy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting Duration</td>
<td>A half-day (four hours) or more</td>
<td>Although a minimum duration may not be needed, the limit of four hours will provide a practical and sensible in-scope boundary for data collection</td>
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**KEY DEVELOPMENT**

As a result of MPI, ICCA, RTE and UNWTO working together there has already been one significant development, representing an important step towards agreement on the scope of the meetings industry.
The UNWTO has put forward a proposal for a new International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) code 8230 ‘Convention and trade show organisers’. In the past, the activities of the industry could only be identified as part of travel and tourism and could not be separated.

*However, there is one pressing issue on which the industry must agree: Should the Gross Value Added (the gross approach) in providing these services be attributed to the meetings organiser OR should it be allocated to the direct providers ie hotels/accommodation, transport, tourist attractions (the net approach)?*

The UNWTO is recommending that the net approach is taken because this meets the UNWTO guidelines.

However, the potential downside of this is that the apparent economic contribution of the meetings industry will be lower than if the gross approach was adopted.

It should be noted at this stage that the new ISIC code for the meetings industry does **not** guarantee that government agencies will implement the new code. They will need persuasion to collect data on the meetings industry which could involve more costs.

**Overwhelming goodwill and political support is fundamental for implementation to take place.**

**THE NEXT STEPS**

The main issues that need to be considered by the Steering Committee are:

1) Discuss with technical experts and any other relevant international agencies, how an international standard method can be adopted, by building on the findings of this report.

2) Agree on the scope of the industry.

3) How will national industry associations be “brought on board” to actively support the measurement of the industry in their country?
4) How will national industry associations be encouraged to educate their members and other industry participants to actively support the implementation of the measurement?

5) How will industry participants be persuaded to fully co-operate with and contribute to the implementation of the adopted measurement of their industry?