



Flanders
State of
the Art

NEW BUSINESS MODEL

CREATE TOMORROW'S HERITAGE IN TIMES OF COVID

VISITFLANDERS

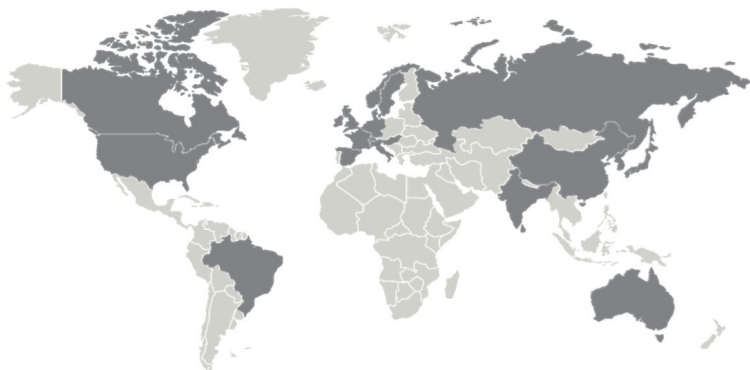


WHO ARE WE?

VISITFLANDERS Convention Bureau is the Bureau from the Flemish Government developing and promoting the region of Flanders on both national and international level within the Meetings Industry.

Flanders, the Northern region of Belgium is located in the heart of Europe. More than 2,000 associations have their headquarters in our region. We share knowledge and provide tailor-made support to associations for creating a successful congress with positive impact.

Our headquarters are based in Brussels and we have 8 offices abroad (New York, London, Paris, Barcelona, Milan, Amsterdam, Vienna, München).

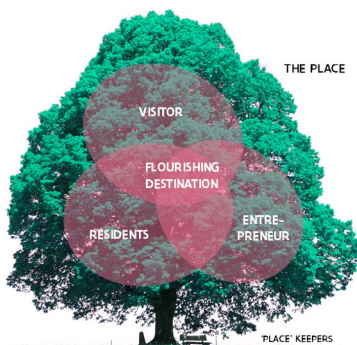


OUR VISION

NOT MORE BUT BETTER CONGRESSES: LEGACY IN A FLOURISHING DESTINATION

VISITFLANDERS developed last year a new Vision for the future called [Travel to Tomorrow](#). Our ambition is to create a flourishing destination. This means we thrive for balance between the needs of the locals, the entrepreneurs, the place itself and of course the visitors whether they are tourists or delegates at a congress.

TRAVEL TO
tomorrow ...



A DIFFERENT WAY OF ATTRACTING CONGRESSES.

Tourism and thus congresses become not the end goal but are the catalyst and the means to this end. This also entails we don't want more congresses, but 'better' congresses. Congresses which match with our DNA and which link to our transition priorities and focus areas. But also congresses that relate to the Flemish assets for which we are known worldwide, such as cycling, gastronomy and heritage. We are looking for congresses that can let our destination flourish, by leaving a positive impact on the long term; creating LEGACY.



[Discover our award winning video](#)



... AND THEN COVID 19 CAME

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES BEING ADDRESSED?

Embracing the New Normal

As Churchill stated **Never waste a good crisis** we realized the huge challenges ahead of us. Challenges we wanted to turn into opportunities.

We addressed two challenges:

1

Find the balance between our long term vision **Travel to Tomorrow** and the need for urgent recovery measures to support the industry

We all faced the unknown. We wanted to get our heads around the consequences of this pandemic for our industry. We organized ourselves (via webinars, calls, readings, one on one meetings with associations and peers, etc) to grasp the new trends popping up and to understand this unique shift we are experiencing from the Old to the New Normal.

How do you assist associations in hosting their congress in a Covid proof and safe environment. How do you keep your partners and stakeholders in the destination engaged when a congress is cancelled or turned into a hybrid event? Clearly solutions had to be found quickly. The demand for new supporting measures was high. The industry was suffering dramatically. There was no time to lose. New tools and actions had to be taken.

Simultaneously we were looking at ways to integrate and translate this new shift into our vision of Travel to Tomorrow - Create tomorrow's heritage. This meant we had to **combine the short term -even very ad hoc demand- with our long term vision.**

Our new vision stands for co creation together with locals, entrepreneurs, visitors and the place, It stands for sustainability and the ultimate goal is to develop added value for the destination whereby congresses become the catalyst for change.

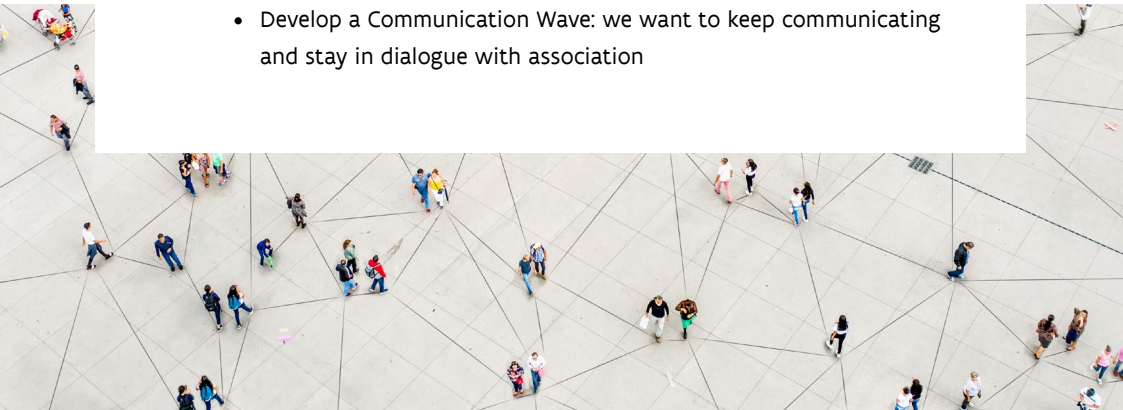
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Assist on a very short term the industry and the associations with new tools and services also designed for the longer term

We geared ourselves up.

Due to Covid 19 we took the opportunity to innovate our set of services and tools.

- Develop specific and tailor made, user friendly tools for organisers, venues, hotels, etc.
- Develop training for local partners (venues, hotels, PCO's) but also for the associations
- Develop a Communication Wave: we want to keep communicating and stay in dialogue with association



WHAT IS INNOVATIVE AND CREATIVE ABOUT THE PROJECT; HOW DID IT SHOW LEADERSHIP IN TRANSFORMATION AND WHAT LESSONS CAN OTHER ICCA MEMBERS LEARN FROM YOUR IDEAS?

Four learnings:

1

We acted! We considered all options and implemented rapidly

First of all, we adapted our daily work. While hotels and venues were closing down, congresses were postponed or cancelled, we did not stop. On the contrary, we realized we had an important role to play for our partners and for the associations. The team was agile and flexible and despite the lockdown in Belgium which lasted for 3 months we made a plan. We listened to the needs of partners and associations and followed closely the trends on an international level. We bore in mind all this time how to let our destination flourish as much as possible.

2

We worked strategically and shared our findings and knowledge with peers

Whereas other destinations, venues and hotels work on more a practical level and offer concrete solutions we worked from a strategic point of view. We looked at the bigger picture and developed a long term framework to guide partners and associations. We could easily attach this to our Travel Tomorrow vision and speed up some breakthroughs.

As ARP partner from ICCA we also wanted to share our experiences and best practices and invited different partners to test, experience and give feedback at different stages in the development of the tools.

On top of that we were able to set up during COVID-19 a very intense contact with many policy makers, cabinets and ministers from other departments to discuss recovery measures and solutions. The Convention Bureaus of VISITFLANDERS together with the colleagues of EventFlanders were in the lead. In as short period we've created direct lines with virologist

and we seized the opportunity to put the meetings and events strategy on the policy agenda. Now that relance measures are discussed the meetings and events industry is very visible and upfront.

Furthermore, we kept communicating about our strengths and key clusters during the lockdown. (see How we communicated about the project)

3

We developed new partnerships with knowledge centres and the event sector

We wanted to show leadership and creativity by involving new partners in the development of solutions.

4

We started collaboration with the Alliance of Belgian Event Federations, the Expertise Centre for Public Impact (KdG) and the Belgian Government. The initial purpose of the collaboration with these partners was to support us with surveys and to create tools in different languages, free to use for any organizer, in order to open up safely once the lockdown would be released. Interestingly this collaboration is evolving towards a more permanent structure. We will for instance have regular meetings and work towards a set of common goals.

Finger on the pulse. We remain curious and keep asking many questions

- How to assist associations when they choose to postpone the congress?
- How to make the destination corona proof?
- How to communicate with the right tone?
- What could be hybrid? What are good models?
- How and when to go from physical to hybrid to virtual?
- What are the most appropriate safety measures?
- How to motivate the local partners while many are unemployed or without projects?
- How to keep working on the longer term and keep the conversation going with associations while they have other priorities?
-



HOW WAS THE PROJECT UNDERTAKEN ?

SET OUT ALL THE KEY STEPS.

Futureproof. Although the tools were developed for the current situation around Covid 19 we wanted them to be sustainable and remain useful on the longer term. We developed and designed a tool **for each step in the customer journey** by involving industry partners, peers, researchers, local and federal governments and associations.

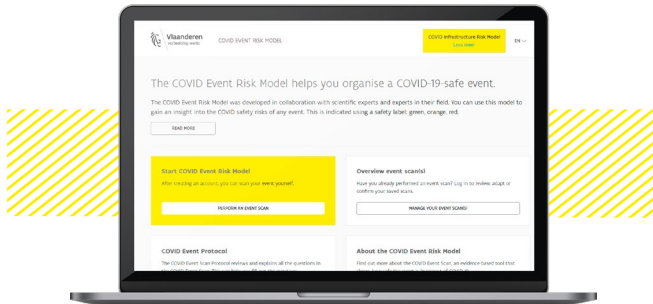
The **package contains 5 important tools**. The primary goal of these tools is to make it possible to safely organize and restart touristic, sports, cultural and corporate events and congresses in Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels, in accordance with the health safety measures laid out by the Belgian government.

1

The Covid Event Risk Model (CERM)

To assist the association in organising a conference/event in the most optimal health safety conditions in Flanders (Belgium) one can use the **COVID Event Risk Model (CERM)**, consisting of the COVID Event Scan and the COVID Event Protocol. These tools are available free of charge. **The COVID Event Scan maps out safety risks**, by means of a simple questionnaire, based on 20 parameters that are known to reduce, or just the opposite, increase the spread of the coronavirus. **The COVID Event**

Protocol is a guide for all event organisers active in the public, for-profit and non-profit sectors, for all types of events, regardless of the type or size of the event. As an organiser, you can assess whether it is possible to organise an event in accordance with the health safety measures, laid out by the Belgian government. The tool is available in 4 languages!



2

The Guidebook Corona-prevention for Meeting Venues: controlled environments

The Guidebook **Corona-prevention** (free for download) provides meeting and conference locations in Flanders with information and tips on how to safely organise events, with the health of participants and employees in mind. It helps meeting locations to prepare for a smooth, safe reopening of the location during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.



3

Loan Refund system for organisers of congresses

The Flemish Government offers the possibility of a reimbursable loan for organisers of events, congresses, meetings. to create working capital for new events in the fall of 2020 and in 2021. The obligation to refund the loan lapses if the event is cancelled due to government measures related to COVID-19. The business risk is not covered: even if the event was loss-making, the support must be repaid. Applications are handled by Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship, the Flemish government agency for entrepreneurs, supporting innovation and entrepreneurship to contribute to a favourable business climate. VISIT**FLANDERS** Convention Bureau was the driving force to put this guarantee and refund system on the agenda and by strategic lobby work could work this out with the Flemish Department of Innovation and Entrepreneurship. As this is a measure for the short term, till 2021 we are now lobbying for the longer term and asking to extend this supportive initiative till 2024 as the long lead time related to association conferences.

4

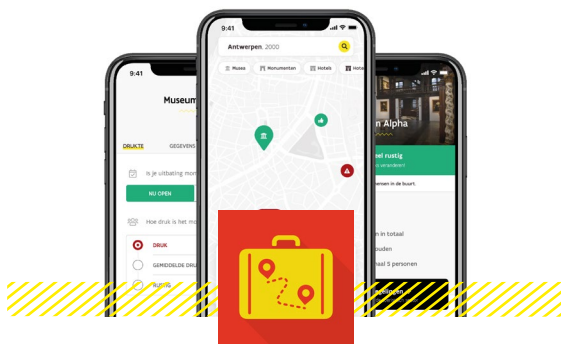
The COVID Infrastructure Risk Model (CIRM)

As of 8 September 2020, larger events and congresses can be organised again in Flanders. This is possible in safe conditions thanks to the introduction of the COVID Infrastructure Risk Model (CIRM). The CIRM has been developed for stadiums, sports halls, theatres, concert halls, event halls and conference locations, to allow these venues to screen their venue for the COVID-19 security risks on the basis of a number of security parameters.

The CIRM relies (partly) on the same set of parameters as the COVID Event Risk Model (CERM), but focuses on how the venue lends itself to the COVID-safe organization of events.

YouFlanders

YouFlanders is a mobile application that gives an overall view of the Flemish tourist offer. The app contains a pressure barometer in which visitors and tourist operators indicate how busy it is in a tourist operation. The app also indicates in a simple way which COVID-19 measures are applicable, both in general and for a specific tourist offer.



HOW DID YOU COMMUNICATE THE PROJECT?

WE FOCUSED ON 3 ITEMS:

- 1 We set up an **international communication wave** around **postponed congresses**
 - On LinkedIn
 - Via Websites
 - With our Partners; all the cities in Flanders
 - The wave was successful and a Guideline for the cities in Flanders was developed to assist them in continuing the communication around postponed congresses

2 **E-book** combining all the different tools: 5 items together

3 We kept the **communication flow open** and intensified the frequency:

- **Our partners:** the cities in Flanders and their CVB's
- Our local partners (venues, hotels, ...) via our training modules of **Meet in Flanders Academy**: we welcomed 250 participants virtually – usually we host 75 participants when meeting physically
- **Our PCO's:** set up 3 webinars with 10 Belgian PCO's
- **Our peers:** we shared our vision with the strategic Alliance of National Convention Bureaus of Europe
- **Our target groups:** We presented our destination at the ARP session in June for 5 associations and mention our tools at each webinar and meeting
- **Our international market:** All our offices abroad (8 offices): communicated to their markets



More on: www.meetinflanders.com/en/covid-19-info



SET OUT DETAILED AMBITIONS AND EXPLAIN HOW THE INITIATIVE SHOWED LEADERSHIP IN TRANSFORMATION, COVERING BOTH SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL ISSUES.

VISITFLANDERS took the opportunity from March till September 2020 **to develop and innovate**. The Covid Event Risk model has become a safety tool consulted already by over 30 000 users and it has been picked up by other destinations like e.g Norway and Croatia. The development of the CERM tool has been **pioneering** work for us and accelerated the designing of other tools to guarantee safety in the destination. By **sharing the development** and the testing of the CERM tool with peers and other organisations we feel we have shown leadership. We strongly believe the **way forward is co creation** and openly sharing expertise and solutions. This will make the industry as a whole more professional, **futureproof and humane!**

Flanders has come out of this crisis even stronger, as a premier destination for congresses and conventions. During the lockdown, we followed training sessions, workshops, and seminars to help us provide an even more professional service. Together with our partners – congress venues, hotels, transport, catering and PCOs but also academic and policy partners and research institutes, – we are now able to respond even more flexibly to sudden changes and new situations. The result is that you can safely organise your conference in Flanders.