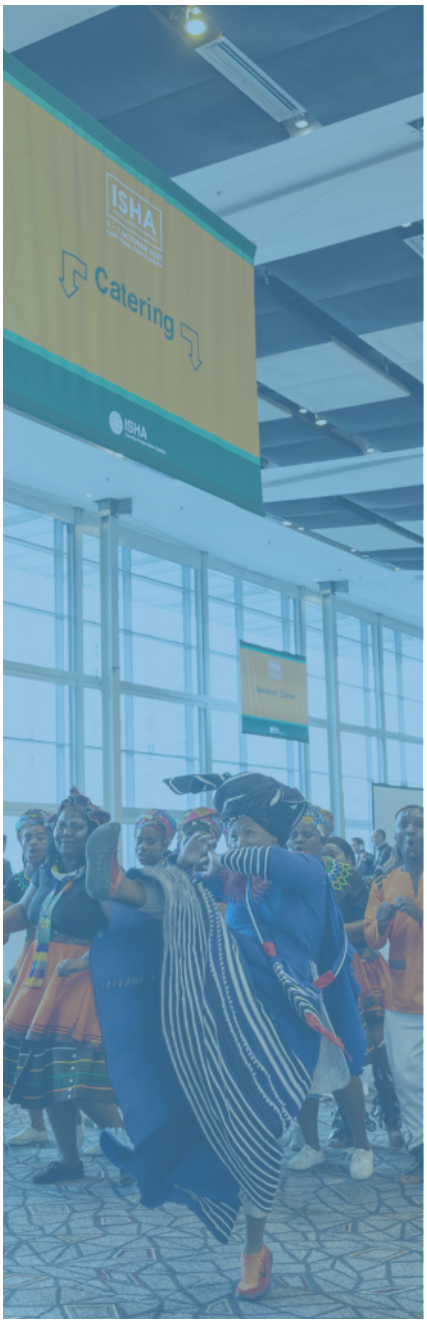
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Today's cities shaping tomorrow's world



ICCA

10 Year Anniversary Report

Incredible Impacts Programme


ISHA
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Ecocity Centre
of Excellence
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INTRODUCTION

When BestCities Global Alliance and ICCA launched the Incredible Impacts Programme 10 years ago, we set out to change the way the meetings industry approached business events. Attendance, economic contribution, and room nights have always mattered, but they are only part of the story. For us, the greater measure of success is what a meeting can make possible for the people and places it touches – and what can endure long after delegates return to their own lives.

Over the past decade, associations across the world have shown us just how far-reaching this impact can be. Submissions to the Incredible Impacts Programme have advocated for equitable access to healthcare, bringing marginalized voices into global conversations, restoring natural environments, and so much more.

The numbers give a sense of the programme's reach. In its first decade, the Incredible Impacts Programme received 264 submissions: 232 for the Main Grant and 32 for the Seed Fund, which was introduced in 2023 to help early-stage initiatives get off the ground. To date, US$250,000 has been awarded to support associations as they launch, strengthen, and expand their impact initiatives in destinations across the world.

But the clearest measure of the programme is the people and communities behind the numbers.

At the World Down Syndrome Congress in Glasgow, people with Down syndrome took on central roles, such as welcoming delegates, introducing speakers, and facilitating workshops. At the same time, members of the Commissioner

Programme trained more than 300 hospitality workers across the city, contributing to a more informed and welcoming destination for people with Down syndrome.

In Khovd Province, Mongolia, the Women's Empowerment Summit brought together 328 people from nomadic communities and 16 Indigenous ethnic groups to address issues ranging from domestic violence and reproductive health to financial literacy and climate change. The gathering inspired survivors to seek support and form income-generating groups, while a handful of male participants formed a club committed to reducing gender-based and domestic violence.

In Ireland, the legacy of the World Rural Health Conference in Limerick extended into healthcare policy, education, and workforce development. The work that followed included Ireland's first national standing committee for rural general practice, a €1.8 million Rural GP Fellowship Programme, and initiatives designed to bring more doctors into underserved communities.

These stories are very different, but they share a critical idea: a meeting can and should be a catalyst. By bringing together expertise, resources, and people with the ability to act, a business event in one destination can address challenges that affect people and communities around the world.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide the organising framework for this report, connecting these individual stories to shared global priorities such as health, education, equality, environmental action, inclusive cities, strong institutions, and international cooperation. They also reflect a key concept we have learned over the past decade: impact rarely fits into one category. Greater access to education can reduce gender inequality. Advancing women's rights can make entire communities stronger. Addressing health disparities can necessitate progress in education, policy, and economic opportunity.

Over the past 10 years, Incredible Impacts has helped broaden the industry's understanding of what meaningful impact can look like. More and more associations are involving people with lived experience, working with destinations from the outset, and developing models that can be adapted and carried forward by future host cities. The Seed Fund has extended that work even further, helping associations just starting their impact journey turn their ideas into action.

The stories in this report show how far the industry has come – and what is possible when we look past what happens at a meeting to what can happen because of it.

Loren Christie,
Managing Director,
BestCities Global Alliance

Dr Senthil Gopinath,
Chief Executive Officer,
International Congress & Convention Association (ICCA)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A decade of the Incredible Impacts Programme provides a substantial body of evidence showing how international association meetings can facilitate positive change. This anniversary collection brings together 110 shortlisted Main Grant initiatives, alongside Seed Fund recipients and other notable examples spanning health, education, environmental action, technology, human rights, and more. Together, they demonstrate the breadth of impact made possible by business events: advancing public health, broadening access to education and professional opportunities, bringing lived experience into decision-making, influencing policy, and strengthening communities.

The Sustainable Development Goals provide a lens through which we can follow this work across the decade. A retrospective review of the 33 shortlisted initiatives from 2017 to 2019 – before SDG information was formally collected – found strong alignment with Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10), Quality Education (SDG 4), Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17), and Good Health and Wellbeing (SDG 3). In 2020, applicants began identifying the SDGs supported by their initiatives. Viewed together, the submissions demonstrate how closely these goals intersect, with progress in areas such as education, health, and gender equality often contributing to wider social and economic outcomes.

Several lessons have emerged over the decade:

- **Start with a clear challenge.** Focus on a specific need the meeting can address.
- **Involve the people most affected.** Lived experience should be a central priority that informs the project.
- **Bring destinations in early.** Local partners can provide the connections and resources that make legacy ideas plausible.
- **Make opportunities accessible.** Removing barriers extends the benefits of a meeting to people who might otherwise be excluded.
- **Plan for later.** Build partnerships and models that can continue locally or be adapted by future host cities.
- **Measure what changes.** Look beyond delegate count and room nights to outcomes in knowledge, behaviour, practice, policy, and health.

Ten years of Incredible Impacts shows an industry becoming more deliberate about creating, measuring, and extending the positive legacy of its meetings. This report captures that evolution and shares what has been learned, giving associations and destinations practical ideas they can apply to their own events.

10 YEARS OF IMPACT

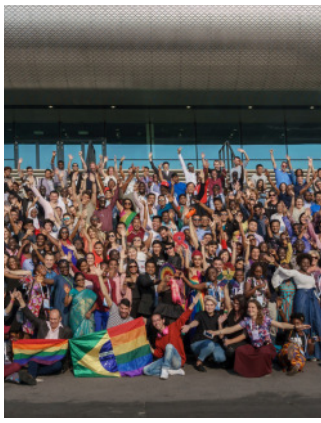


US$
250,000
AWARDED

264	**SUBMISSIONS**
232	**MAIN GRANT SUBMISSIONS**
32	**SEED FUND SUBMISSIONS**
110	**MAIN GRANT INITIATIVES SHORTLISTED**











EXAMPLES OF IMPACT



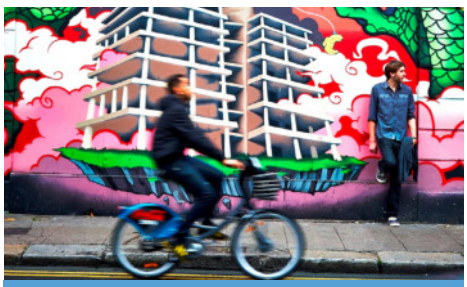
300+

Glasgow hospitality workers trained by people with Down syndrome.



328

participants at the Women's Empowerment Summit in Mongolia.



100+

experienced GPs connected with rural Irish communities.

WHAT A MEETING CAN START

A meeting represents a rare instance of people with resources, influence, and lived experience rallying around a shared issue. Turning that opportunity into real-life impact starts with intention.

The starting point might be a gap in healthcare or education, an issue that needs public attention, or a group whose perspective has been missing from the conversation. From there, associations can consider what their meeting uniquely brings to the table, and how its people, partnerships, and resources can help.

The result doesn't need to be a large-scale global programme. It could be a public awareness campaign, a scholarship, a policy initiative, or community training. What matters most is that the event becomes a launchpad for action.

The Incredible Impacts Programme supports associations at this crucial junction with funding designed for different stages of development:

- **Seed Fund – US$5,000**: Helps associations test, refine, or launch early-stage ideas.
- **Main Grant – US$20,000:** Supports established initiatives with demonstrated results and the potential to grow.

An early-stage initiative might still be testing an approach or figuring out how to measure results, while an established project could be ready to expand or adapt a proven model.

The Incredible Impacts shortlist celebrates 110 initiatives at various points along this journey. Some have reached communities globally, while others are concentrated in the host destination. Some have produced measurable results; others are testing an initial idea.

Together, they show there is no single formula for creating impact; however, there is much to learn from associations that have gone through the process. Looking back over the past decade, we can see how these approaches have evolved, and how the industry's understanding of what a meeting can achieve has grown with them.

TWO PATHWAYS TO LASTING IMPACT

Supporting associations at different stages of their journey
- from early ideas to expanded, long-term impact.

SEED FUND

US$5,000

Helping associations test, refine, or launch early-stage impact initiatives.

MAIN GRANT

US$20,000

Supporting established initiatives with demonstrated results and potential to grow.

THE INCREDIBLE IMPACTS

10 YEARS OF CHANGE

The Incredible Impacts Programme has evolved in step with the industry's sharpening conviction to make the world a better place through meetings.

Early initiatives showed the potential of public health campaigns, professional education, community outreach, environmental action, and greater inclusion. In subsequent years, associations became more deliberate and specific about aligning their work with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The introduction of the Seed Fund in 2023 marked another step in this evolution, enabling the programme to nurture ideas in earlier stages of development.

A DECADE AT A GLANCE

2017

Incredible Impacts is born

LAUNCH

9 MAIN GRANT SHORTLISTED

- **Recipients:**
  International Society on Thrombosis and Haemostasis, World Parkinson Coalition, World Confederation for Physical Therapy
- Early themes include health awareness, patient inclusion, professional education, and accessibility.

2018

The scope expands

12 MAIN GRANT SHORTLISTED

- **Recipients:**
  Down Syndrome International, Society for Ecological Restoration, Union for International Cancer Control
- Initiatives expand into inclusion, ecological restoration, cancer policy, women's leadership, environmental education, and social development.

2019

Impact is amplified

12 MAIN GRANT SHORTLISTED

- **Recipients:**
  European Lung Foundation/European Respiratory Society, International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, International AIDS Society
- Public health campaigns, scholarships, community engagement, and advocacy extend the reach of these meetings.

2020

The SDGs provide a common framework

13 MAIN GRANT SHORTLISTED

SDG REPORTING INTRODUCED

- **Recipients:**
  Ecocity Builders, Soroptimist International, International Society for Microbial Ecology
- Applicants begin formally identifying the SDGs supported by their initiatives.

2021

New approaches emerge

11 MAIN GRANT SHORTLISTED

- **Recipients:**
  Women Deliver, European AIDS Clinical Society, TAITRA (MEET TAIWAN) for the Fourth World Conference of Women's Shelters
- Initiatives span health equity, accessibility, social inclusion, sustainable transport, and digital delivery.

2022

The decade's biggest shortlist

14 MAIN GRANT SHORTLISTED

- **Recipients:**
  International Society for Cerebral Blood Flow and Metabolism, International Water Resources Association, Football is Medicine
- Initiatives tackle issues such as public health, water security, sport, and professional practice.

2023

The Seed Fund launches

SEED FUND LAUNCH

12 MAIN GRANT SHORTLISTED

- **Recipient (Main Grant):**
  Associated Country Women of the World
- **Recipient (Seed Fund):**
  International Papillomavirus Society
- The new Seed Fund establishes a platform for early-stage ideas.

2024

The Seed Fund expands early-stage support

11 MAIN GRANT SHORTLISTED

- **Recipient (Main Grant):**
  European Academy of Childhood Disability
- **Recipient (Seed Fund):**
  International Cartilage Regeneration & Joint Preservation Society
- Initiatives advance inclusive participation and broaden access to specialist education.

2025

Impact becomes embedded

8 MAIN GRANT SHORTLISTED

- **Recipient (Main Grant):**
  World Organization of Family Doctors
- **Recipient (Seed Fund):**
  Autism-Europe
- Initiatives connect meetings with longer-term change in healthcare, policy, workforce development, and inclusion.

2026

Building on a decade of impact

8 MAIN GRANT SHORTLISTED

- **Finalists (Main Grant):**
  WindEurope, Housing Europe, Autism-Europe
- **Recipient (Seed Fund):**
  International Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Association
- Initiatives address the green transition, social housing, autistic inclusion and employment, and healthcare equity.

10 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

The 2026 Main Grant recipient will be announced in November 2026.



THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE IMPACT

The Sustainable Development Goals provide a useful framework for understanding the global influence of the Incredible Impacts Programme. Its initiatives have advanced health, education, equality, environmental action, and innovation in communities around the world, often contributing to several goals at once.

Formal SDG information was first collected from candidates in 2020. For entries between 2017 and 2019, we conducted a retrospective review based on each application's objectives, activities, and intended legacy. **SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)** was associated with 20 of the 33 early entries; **SDG 4 (Quality Education)** and **SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)** appeared in 19; and **SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing)** appeared in 18.

The stories that follow highlight successful initiatives in five areas of impact: healthier lives, opportunity and knowledge, voices and inclusion, stronger communities, and planet and place.

FIVE AREAS OF IMPACT

How association meetings contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.



Healthier Lives

Health, wellbeing, nutrition, sanitation, and access to care.



Opportunity and Knowledge

Education, skills, innovation, decent work, and shared learning.



Voices and Inclusion

Equality, accessibility, representation, and participation.



Stronger Communities

Local resilience, social development, and community benefit.



Planet and Place

Climate, biodiversity, resources, and sustainable destinations.

Projects may contribute to multiple SDGs across more than one area of impact.

HEALTHIER LIVES

Health is the most prominent theme across the decade, with many meetings working towards equitable care and providing the public with the knowledge and resources to help them live healthier lives.

WORLD RURAL HEALTH CONFERENCE 2022 (LIMERICK, IRELAND)

World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA)

The 2022 World Rural Health Conference in Limerick helped elevate rural healthcare to Ireland's national agenda. Its legacy included Ireland's first national standing committee for rural general practice, the country's first Professor of Rural General Practice, and a €1.8 million Rural GP Fellowship Programme. More than 100 overseas GPs were placed in local communities, with WONCA reporting annual rural GP workforce growth rising from 1.5% to 3.9%.





ERS INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS 2019 – HEALTHY LUNGS FOR LIFE (MADRID, SPAIN)

European Lung Foundation & European Respiratory Society (ERS)

Healthy Lungs for Life brings lung-health education and testing directly into communities around the world. Millions of lung-function tests were reported in India and Southeast Asia during one campaign period, alongside more than 3,000 tests for members of the public during the 2016 ERS International Congress in London. Grants have helped local organisations continue the work in countries such as Tanzania, Pakistan, Portugal, and Nigeria.

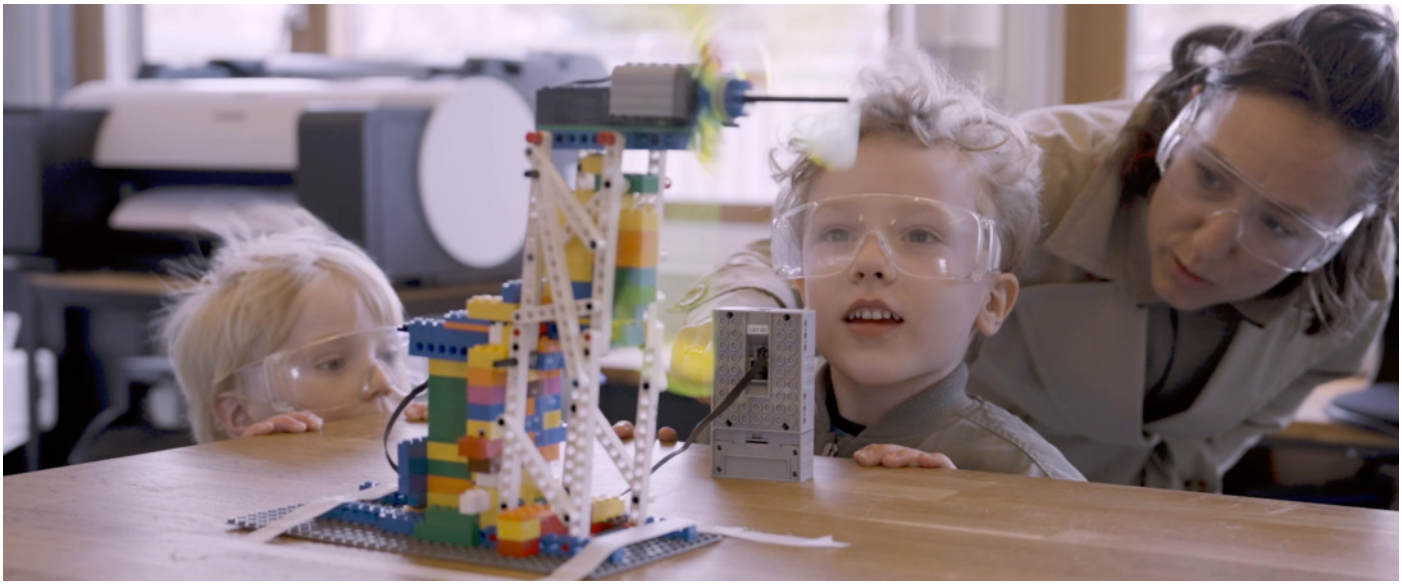
OPPORTUNITY AND KNOWLEDGE

Education is a connective thread that runs throughout the Incredible Impacts Programme shortlist; after all, meetings are fundamentally knowledge platforms. The differentiator is the actions associations take to broaden access, adapt learning to local contexts, and continue knowledge exchange after the event.

WINDEUROPE ANNUAL EVENT 2025 (COPENHAGEN, DENMARK)

WindEurope

WindEurope's permanent STEM education programme reaches approximately 20,000 children each year, introducing young people to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics through the lens of wind energy. The programme brings the association's expertise into schools and communities while helping young people see themselves in the future green-energy workforce.



XVII WORLD WATER CONGRESS 2021 – WORLD WATER ENVOYS PROGRAMME (DAEGU, SOUTH KOREA)

International Water Resources Association (IWRA)

Five World Water Envoys carried knowledge and connections from the World Water Envoys Programme back to their own communities, contributing to local action. Follow-on work included improvements to drinking-water infrastructure in Nepal, farmer education in Palestine, and establishing a foundation for integrated water-resource management in Zimbabwe.



VOICES AND INCLUSION

Some of the programme's strongest legacies have come from ensuring people most affected by an issue have a voice in the conversation and planning that comes next.

WORLD DOWN SYNDROME CONGRESS 2018 (GLASGOW, SCOTLAND)

Down Syndrome International

At the 2018 World Down Syndrome Congress in Glasgow, adults with Down syndrome took on formal roles, including welcoming delegates, introducing speakers, and facilitating workshops. Their influence extended across the city, where members of the Commissioner Programme helped train more than 300 hospitality workers, leaving Glasgow with greater confidence to welcome and serve people with Down syndrome.



AFRICAN WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE – ILEAD

African Women in Leadership Organisation

The iLEAD programme brought leadership education, peer mentorship, and community service into schools, giving young people opportunities to develop as leaders within their own communities. By engaging girls and boys together, the programme addressed gender inequality as a shared challenge and sought to build more inclusive attitudes and leadership for the future.



STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Meetings can leave their strongest legacy when international expertise is applied to the priorities and lived experience already present in communities.



ACWW WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT SUMMIT 2023 (KHOVD PROVINCE, MONGOLIA)

Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW)

In Khovd Province, Mongolia, ACWW brought together 328 people from nomadic communities and 16 Indigenous ethnic groups to address pressing issues such as domestic violence, reproductive health, and human rights. The gathering prompted survivors of violence to seek support, contributed to the creation of income-generating groups, and inspired male participants to establish a group engaging in reducing gender-based and domestic violence.

ECOCITY WORLD SUMMIT 2019 (VANCOUVER, CANADA)

Ecocity Builders & BCIT Ecocity Centre

The 2019 Ecocity World Summit in Vancouver united 10 British Columbia municipalities – collectively representing more than half of the province's population – with tools to build more sustainable communities. It also helped establish the first Ecocity Centre at the British Columbia Institute of Technology, while participating municipalities entered a two-year programme providing training and practical tools to measure and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and ecological footprints.





INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL HOUSING FESTIVAL 2025 (DUBLIN, IRELAND)

Housing Europe

At the 2025 International Social Housing Festival in Dublin, Housing Europe brought tenants' lived experiences into conversations with housing professionals, policymakers, and other decision-makers. The initiative strengthened relationships within Dublin's housing community while giving people directly affected by housing policy a greater role in discussions about its future.

PLANET AND PLACE

Environmental legacy takes massive steps forward when meetings turn global knowledge into practical action that benefits people and places.



ISES SOLAR WORLD CONGRESS 2017 (ABU DHABI, UAE)

International Solar Energy Society (ISES)

The Solar World Congress convened researchers, policymakers, educators, financiers, and businesses working towards the transition to renewable energy. By doing so, ISES helped strengthen the relationships needed to move solar-energy research towards policy and practical implementations.

7TH WORLD CONFERENCE ON ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION 2017 (FOZ DO IGUASSU, BRAZIL)

Society for Ecological Restoration (SER)

SER brought ecological restoration out of the conference room and into its host destinations, where delegates and local volunteers took part in hands-on restoration projects. This left visible improvements in local environments while expanding local knowledge, participation, and stewardship that could continue after delegates left.



SEED TO SCALE

Not every association starts with an established impact programme or evidence base. The Incredible Impacts Seed Fund was introduced in 2023 to help associations move from a strong concept to a credible pilot and, ultimately, a more developed impact initiative.

The International Papillomavirus Society (IPVS) received the inaugural Seed Fund and went on to become a Main Grant finalist in 2025. Autism-Europe followed a similar path, receiving Seed Funding in 2025 before being selected as a Main Grant finalist in 2026.

These examples illustrate how the Seed Fund can help associations test and strengthen their ideas, demonstrate early results, and develop initiatives with the potential for greater impact over time.

IPVS

2023 Seed Fund ⟶ 2025 Main Grant Finalist

AUTISM-EUROPE

2025 Seed Fund ⟶ 2026 Main Grant Finalist

SEED FUND RECIPIENTS

2023: 36TH INTERNATIONAL PAPILLOMAVIRUS CONFERENCE (EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND)

International Papillomavirus Society (IPVS)

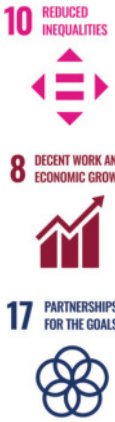
IPVS earned the first Seed Fund to support its public-health programme focused on HPV vaccination and cervical screening. Working with universities, youth services, Public Health Scotland, and community partners, the initiative aimed to reach students and women in age groups where screening uptake was declining. The project demonstrated how an international congress could catalyse local action to strengthen prevention and minimize health disparities.



2024: ICRS GLOBAL ACCESS FELLOWSHIP

International Cartilage Regeneration & Joint Preservation Society (ICRS)

The ICRS Global Access Fellowship was designed to open specialist education to professionals from regions often underrepresented at international meetings. Fellows received fully funded participation followed by two years of association membership and ongoing follow-up, extending the opportunity into longer-term professional networks, knowledge exchange, and career development.



2025: AUTISM-EUROPE CONGRESS (DUBLIN, IRELAND)

Autism-Europe

Autism-Europe has extended inclusion beyond accessible event participation into everyday working life. Its work brings autistic voices into conversations with employers and policymakers, addressing barriers to recruitment, retention, and workplace participation while encouraging organisations to build more inclusive environments.



Towards More Equitable Liver-Cancer Care

2026: 17TH IHPBA WORLD CONGRESS (SINGAPORE)

International Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Association (IHPBA)

IHPBA's 2026 Legacy Project leverages the World Congress in Singapore to address disparities in liver-cancer care across Asia-Pacific and lower- and middle-income settings. The initiative proposes a regional equity map and assessment framework, equity forum, and policy commitments. Designed as a multi-year programme, it illustrates how a congress can serve as the starting point for regional collaboration and system-level change.



WHAT MAKES IMPACT LAST?

Across 10 years of Incredible Impacts, the strongest examples share a set of characteristics that help extend a meeting-based initiative into wide-reaching, enduring impact.

Start with a defined problem

Strong projects are clear about the change they want to achieve, who is affected, and what stands in the way. IHPBA's 2026 proposal, for example, identifies gaps in access, affordability, readiness, and timeliness of cancer care rather than framing the challenge simply as a lack of knowledge.

Connect impact to purpose

The most credible legacy activity builds on an association's existing expertise, mission, and convening power. Healthy Lungs for Life, World Thrombosis Day, and the ICRS Global Access Fellowship are direct extensions of what their associations exist to advance.

Design with people

The strongest initiatives involve the people most affected, rather than designing on their behalf. Down Syndrome International, Associated Country Women of the World, and Autism-Europe show how lived experience can strengthen relevance, credibility, and accountability.

Engage the destination early

Destinations can identify local partners, policy priorities, communities, venues, media opportunities, and measurement resources. Their value is greatest when they are involved before the programme is fixed.

Remove barriers to participation

Travel support, registration waivers, translation, accessible venues, flexible formats, and community transport can make conferences accessible to people who might otherwise be unable to attend. Designing for access from the beginning helps broaden participation and ensures more people can benefit from its knowledge, connections, and opportunities.

Build beyond the event

Mentorship, membership, toolkits, networks, publications, declarations, registries, and host-city handovers give the project somewhere to go after the congress.

Measure meaningful change

Attendance shows reach, but not necessarily impact. Stronger frameworks track knowledge, confidence, behaviour, partnerships, services, policy, and longer-term outcomes.

Design for replication

Impact grows when a project can travel. Models such as Autism-Europe's inclusive-event model, IHPBA's rotating equity forums, and the World Water Envoys approach all contain mechanisms for knowledge and action to continue in future destinations.

Measuring impact is both an opportunity and a challenge. Associations often have strong evidence of what happened during and immediately after a meeting, but less insight into what changes months or years later. Since long-term outcomes can be influenced by many factors, the goal is to understand how the meeting contributed to a wider process of change.

A practical measurement framework can be organised across five levels:

01 — INPUTS

Funding, expertise, partnerships, and resources.

02 — ACTIVITIES

Workshops, campaigns, mentoring, and community initiatives.

03 — OUTPUTS

People reached, resources produced, and commitments made.

04 — OUTCOMES

Changes in knowledge, behaviour, access, and practice.

05 — LONGER-TERM IMPACT

Sustained changes in policy, health, equality, or communities.

Effective measurement distinguishes between what an association delivered and what changed as a result. It should also capture when evidence was collected and who provided it. A participant survey immediately after an event is valuable, but it measures something very different from a policy change two years later.

SHORT-, MEDIUM- AND LONG-TERM INDICATORS

Immediate indicators

Question: Did people participate and experience the activity as intended?

Possible measures: Reach, attendance, representation, accessibility, satisfaction, knowledge gain, and commitments made.

Examples: ICRS pre- and post-event surveys, public-event attendance, and the number and diversity of scholarship recipients.

Medium-term indicators

Question: Are people or organisations using what was created?

Possible measures: New collaborations, repeated activities, changes in practice, use of toolkits, employer action, mentoring, service referrals, and follow-on participation.

Examples: World Water Envoys mentoring later cohorts, uptake of inclusive event-design guidance, and local organisations continuing a programme.

Long-term indicators

Question: Has the project contributed to sustained system or community change?

Possible measures: Policy adoption, health outcomes, institutional capacity, continuing networks, and replicated programmes.

Examples: IHPBA targets for earlier diagnosis, improved treatment access, and national policy; or future host cities adopting an established model.

Three recent initiatives offer concrete examples of how associations are measuring longer-term change:

ICRS Global Access Fellowship: Proposed measures include diversity benchmarks, pre- and post-event surveys, case studies, tracking collaborations, and long-term follow-up of recipients' careers and contributions.

Autism-Europe: Developed a shared Theory of Change and mixed-method measurement framework incorporating 755 survey responses from delegates, speakers, staff, volunteers, and public event participants, alongside interviews, media data, and stakeholder reporting.

IHPBA 2026 Legacy Project: Set targets spanning participation, data collection, guideline development, policy commitments, earlier diagnosis, treatment access, and survival, with defined measures and responsibility for tracking progress.

10

STORIES FROM A DECADE OF IMPACT

Behind the Incredible Impacts Programme's milestones and numbers are people and communities whose lives have been changed for the better by these projects. The following stories highlight 10 examples of what happens after the meeting, including new opportunities, stronger communities, and changes in practice, policy, and access.





1. WORLD THROMBOSIS DAY

International Society on Thrombosis and Haemostasis | 2017 recipient

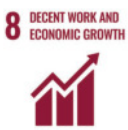
What started as a single event became a global public health campaign that continues annually. World Thrombosis Day now gives partners around the world a platform to raise awareness of thrombosis as a major preventable cause of death and disability, turning specialist knowledge into locally relevant education and action.

Lesson: A meeting can inspire a global movement that continues to educate and engage people year after year.













2. COMMISSIONERS AT THE CENTRE OF THE CONGRESS

Down Syndrome International | 2018 recipient

The World Down Syndrome Congress helped make Glasgow more inclusive for people with Down syndrome – not only inside the congress, but across the city. Commissioners trained more than 300 hospitality workers in hotels, restaurants, venues, and transport, helping create a more welcoming visitor experience and leaving local businesses with knowledge they could continue to use after delegates went home.

Lesson: A meeting can leave a destination more inclusive when people with lived experience are empowered to lead the change.



3. HEALTHY LUNGS FOR LIFE

European Lung Foundation and European Respiratory Society | 2019 recipient

Healthy Lungs for Life grew from a meeting initiative into a global campaign reaching communities across multiple continents. Millions of lung-function tests have been reported in India and Southeast Asia, while grants enabled organisations in countries such as Tanzania, Pakistan, Portugal, and Nigeria to bring lung health education and activities directly to their communities.

Lesson: A meeting can create a model for global impact when local partners have the resources to adapt it for their own communities.



4. WOMEN, WATER, AND LEADERSHIP

Soroptimist International | 2020 recipient

Soroptimist International delivered something fundamental: reliable clean water. The benefits reached much further. Communities reported decreases in water-borne disease and conjunctivitis; women earned income from produce grown with new irrigation; and women and girls gained skills in farming, sanitation, conservation, water-system maintenance, and community leadership. Five girls also went on to pursue welding diplomas, supported by an ongoing mentoring programme.

Lesson: Solving one fundamental challenge can create a ripple effect across health, livelihoods, education, and women's independence.





5. FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE OF WOMEN'S SHELTERS

TAITRA (MEET TAIWAN) | 2021 recipient

The Fourth World Conference of Women's Shelters introduced tools, knowledge, and international connections that continued long after the event. It launched Lila.help as a new resource, established a Study Tour to share Chinese Taipei's experience in violence prevention, and strengthened international networks for continued collaboration and resource sharing. Expanded programming also brought greater attention to LGBTQ+ shelter management, sexual harassment, disability, and the role of art in healing.

Lesson: A meeting can strengthen services across borders by leaving people with practical resources, new approaches, and a global network they can continue to rely on.





6. WORLD WATER ENVOYS

International Water Resources Association | 2022 recipient

The impact of the World Water Congress reached communities thousands of kilometres from the meeting itself. Five World Water Envoys returned home and put their learning into practice, contributing to drinking-water pipelines in Nepal, farmer education in Palestine, and groundwork for integrated water-resource management in Zimbabwe. Their involvement continued through IWRA's young professionals network, creating opportunities to support future cohorts.

Lesson: Helping participants apply what they learn can turn one meeting into practical action in communities worldwide.

7. WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT SUMMIT IN KHOVD

Associated Country Women of the World | 2023 recipient

120 PARTICIPANTS formed income-generating groups.

The Women's Empowerment Summit translated conversations into measurable action. After the summit, 12 survivors of domestic violence sought support, 120 participants formed income-generating groups, five men established a group addressing gender-based and domestic violence, and the provincial government committed to continued collaboration with the local partner.

Lesson: A meeting can be a catalyst for change when trusted local partners are there to turn ideas into action.



8. GLOBAL ACCESS FELLOWSHIP

International Cartilage Regeneration & Joint Preservation Society | 2024 Seed Fund recipient

The Global Access Fellowship was designed to make the opportunity last long after the congress. Alongside fully funded participation, fellows from underrepresented regions received two years of association membership, extending their access to specialist education and professional networks. Longer-term follow-up will track how that access influenced their careers and future collaborations.

Lesson: Removing the barriers to one meeting can open the door to years of learning, connection, and professional opportunity.



Improving Health, Empowering Communities.

9. STRENGTHENING RURAL HEALTHCARE BEYOND THE CONGRESS

World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA) | 2025
Main Grant recipient

The legacy of the World Rural Health Conference in Limerick can be seen in changes to Ireland's healthcare system. The work that followed included the country's first national standing committee for rural general practice, its first Professor of Rural General Practice, a €1.8 million Rural GP Fellowship Programme, and the placement of more than 100 experienced overseas GPs in communities around Ireland.

Lesson: A meeting can accelerate systemic change when its ideas are carried forward through policy, programmes, institutions, and investment.



€1.8M
Rural GP Fellowship Programme

100+
Overseas GPs placed in Irish communities

10. ADVANCING EQUITY IN LIVER-CANCER CARE

International Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Association I 2026 Seed Fund recipient

IHPBA is using its 2026 World Congress in Singapore as the starting point for a longer-term effort to improve liver-cancer care across participating countries. The initiative will track whether the work leads to policy commitments, earlier diagnosis, greater access to curative treatment, and ultimately improved survival across participating countries

Lesson: Planning for what happens after the meeting – including who will lead, measure, and carry on the work – gives an initiative a better chance of achieving lasting change.



A successful congress should be remembered not only for the science it presents, but for the lasting difference it creates.

Dr. Shridhar Iyer, Chair of the IHPBA 2026 Legacy Project & Congress President of IHPBA 2026.



WHAT THE INDUSTRY NEEDS NEXT

More than ever, we are starting to recognise that international association meetings can create positive, lasting change in the world. But are associations and destinations working toward the same goals? And what stands in the way of translating good intentions into real results?

In 2026, BestCities Global Alliance commissioned Strategic Membership Solutions to examine how the meetings industry approaches impact and legacy. The research gathered responses from 165 associations; 34 destinations and venues; and 48 professional congress organisers (PCOs), consultants, and suppliers worldwide.

The findings portray an industry that recognises the potential of legacy but still faces challenges bridging ambition and action. They also surface an opportunity: the knowledge, experience, and practical examples gathered through the Incredible Impacts Programme can help associations and destinations overcome these barriers and achieve more together.

A NEW OPPORTUNITY FOR DESTINATIONS TO STAND OUT

Nearly half (**49%**) of associations surveyed report placing greater emphasis on legacy. However, only **18%** of destinations believe legacy is a top priority for associations.

This disconnect suggests that associations and destinations may be missing opportunities to work together. It also raises an interesting question: could a stronger legacy offer help destinations attract international meetings?

The research suggests it could. Only **3%** of international associations formally score impact when selecting a host destination, while 34% never raise the subject. Yet **67%** would consider a destination they might otherwise overlook if it presented a compelling legacy opportunity, and 35% say such an offer has already influenced their choice of host city.

Rather than waiting for associations to ask about legacy, destinations can lead the conversation. What is the association trying to accomplish? Which local organisations share its priorities? And what could they achieve together?

Consider the World Down Syndrome Congress in Glasgow, where people with Down syndrome trained more than 300 hospitality workers to create a more inclusive visitor experience. Or the World Rural Healthcare Conference in Limerick, where local partnerships helped turn international expertise into advances in healthcare policy, education, and workforce development.

Both demonstrate what's possible when associations and destinations work towards shared goals, combining the reach of an international meeting with the knowledge and resources of its host community. They also show how destinations can distinguish themselves by what they can help a meeting accomplish, beyond convention facilities, accommodation, and visitor experiences.

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR HEALTH AND SCIENCE

Health and science associations organise some of the world's biggest international congresses, yet only **22%** consider legacy a top priority.

What if more of these associations made lasting impact a central part of their meetings? The potential is considerable. Look at Healthy Lungs for Life, which has taken respiratory education and testing into communities around the world.

World Thrombosis Day is another shining example, having grown over the years into an enduring public health campaign.

Scientific meetings can do more than advance knowledge within a profession. They can put that knowledge to work for patients, healthcare workers, and communities, using international congresses as a platform for broader change.

WHEN RESOURCES ARE LIMITED

Even when associations have a clear goal, time and funding can be difficult to find. The survey identifies a gap in sponsorship support: **42%** of respondents want help funding legacy work, but only **29%** have the resources.

This is one barrier Incredible Impacts can help address directly. Its US$5,000 Seed Fund supports early-stage ideas, while the US$20,000 Main Grant recognises established projects with demonstrated results and potential to grow.

The International Papillomavirus Society progressed from a 2023 Seed Fund recipient to a 2025 Main Grant finalist. Autism-Europe followed a similar path, receiving Seed Fund support in 2025, then becoming a Main Grant finalist in 2026.

Their progression illustrates the value of giving associations the resources to start on a manageable scale, learn from the experience, and build towards something bigger.

KEEPING THE WORK GOING WHEN THE MEETING MOVES ON

85%

of destinations and venues say associations rarely or never ask them to collaborate with other host cities

International congresses often move between cities, making continuity a challenge. A quarter of international associations identify this movement as a barrier to lasting impact, while 85% of destinations and venues say associations rarely or never ask them to collaborate with other host cities.

What if each host city could build on the work of the last?

This is an opportunity for BestCities Global Alliance. Its international network can help associations carry relationships, knowledge, and successful approaches between destinations, rather than starting at ground zero each time.

Healthy Lungs for Life offers one model, with local partners adapting its public health campaign for their own communities. Down Syndrome International's Commissioner Programme provides another, showing how inclusive event practices and training can be shared with future hosts.

By working together, associations and destinations can build on what's already been achieved, with BestCities helping to facilitate continuity between host cities.

START WITH WHAT MATTERS TO ASSOCIATIONS

Another important finding is that associations and destinations don't always define success in the same way.

Visitor spending is an important measure for destinations, but for **85%** of associations, the impact that matters most concerns their own membership.

That distinction can change the legacy conversation. Instead of leading with what an event will contribute to the local economy, destinations could ask how hosting the meeting might advance the association's mission. Could it create professional development opportunities, strengthen research networks, or influence policy?

These priorities can also benefit host communities. A fellowship that advances members' careers can strengthen

healthcare delivery. A congress that improves professional practice can lead to better patient care. New relationships between members and local experts can address challenges that neither could tackle alone.

The strongest legacy opportunities are often those in which an association's ambitions and a destination's priorities reinforce one another.

THE CHALLENGE OF MEASURING WHAT LASTS

14%

of survey respondents systematically measure legacy

7%

follow up six months or more after an event

Only **14%** of survey respondents systematically measure legacy, and just **7%** follow up six months or more after an event.

This is troubling, since some of the most important results take time to surface. A new professional relationship might eventually change how care is delivered. A conference discussion might inform policy a year later. Knowledge shared at a meeting could help someone improve conditions in their own community.

Following the Women's Empowerment Summit in Mongolia, 12 survivors of domestic violence sought support, 120 participants formed income-generating groups, and five men established a group addressing gender-based violence. In Ireland, WONCA documented ongoing changes in rural healthcare policy, professional education, and workforce recruitment after the World Rural Health Conference.

More recent Incredible Impacts recipients are also building longer-term evaluation into their plans. The ICRS Global Access Fellowship proposes tracking fellows' professional development, while IHPBA's liver-cancer equity project has established targets spanning policy, diagnosis, treatment access, and survival.

Understanding what happens months or years later after a conference provides valuable insight into what works, what can be improved, and where future investment can move the dial.

TURNING AMBITION INTO ACTION

Together, these findings offer a road to the future of the meetings industry. Associations and destinations recognise the potential for lasting change, but need stronger alignment, earlier planning, and better ways to understand what happens next.

Incredible Impacts provides inspiration, but also much more. Its grants help ideas get started and grow, while its collection of real-world examples offers approaches that others can learn from and adapt.

The next opportunity is to put that knowledge to work more widely, making it easier for associations and destinations to plan together, build on successful approaches, and create benefits that continue long after a meeting ends.

01 — ALIGN PRIORITIES EARLIER

Bring associations and destinations together around shared goals from the outset.

02 — MAKE LEGACY PART OF DESTINATION SELECTION

Show what a destination can help an association accomplish beyond the meeting itself.

03 — MEASURE WHAT LASTS

Track outcomes beyond the event, including changes in communities, practice, and policy.

LOOKING AHEAD

The Incredible Impacts Programme's 10th anniversary is a reminder of the people and communities that have been positively impacted by international association meetings. It's also an opportunity to look ahead – to use a decade of lessons and success stories to inspire more associations and destinations to make positive, lasting impact a priority from the very beginning.

The next phase can make that knowledge even more useful. For example, a searchable platform could help associations and destinations find relevant examples by SDG, geography, beneficiary group, or type of change. Practical resources and guidance can translate successes to other events around the world.

It can also improve how impact is understood over time. Following recipients one, three, or five years after the grant cycle would create a richer picture of what lasts, what changes, and what others can learn.

Impact should be achievable for associations of every size. Not every organisation has extensive funding, dedicated staff, or specialist expertise. Practical tools, peer examples, destination support, and the Seed Fund can continue to help promising ideas get off the ground and grow.

Three priorities can guide the next decade:

- Embed impact planning into the event lifecycle from the outset, ideally during bid development and host-destination selection.
- Use measurements that distinguish between immediate outputs, longer-term outcomes, and the meeting's contribution to change.
- Make successful approaches easier to adapt and carry forward across associations, destinations, and future host cities.

The next chapter of Incredible Impacts will focus on making positive legacy a natural part of how international meetings are conceived, hosted, and evaluated – so that more meetings, in more places, leave something valuable behind.



IMAGE CREDITS & SOURCES

Programme photography supplied by BestCities Global Alliance, ICCA and participating associations unless otherwise noted.

Additional sources:

- P4 – World Parkinson Coalition, World Parkinson Congress community session
- P17 – African Women in Leadership Organisation, iLEAD Club (awlo.africa)
- P18 & 30 – ACWW Women's Empowerment Summit 2023, via BestCities
- P19 – International Solar Energy Society, Solar World Congress 2017 (official event gallery)
- P19 – Society for Ecological Restoration, SER2017 (official event gallery)
- P28 – Soroptimist International, Clean Water for Rural Communities (soroptimistinternational.org)
- P29 – Global Network of Women's Shelters, 2019 Study Tour (official Flickr gallery)

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