

Safe Restart Plan Proposal



Prepared by
BC Meetings & Events Industry Working Group
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Executive Summary

Like many tourism sub-sectors, British Columbia's Meetings & Events Industry was effectively shut down in March 2020 because of the onset of COVID-19. The corresponding loss of business travel not only had a devastating impact on hotels, restaurants, convention centres and other meeting venues, it also drastically affected hundreds of small and medium-sized businesses around the province that support the industry, many of which lost between 85% and 100% of projected annual revenues last year. These losses translate into an estimate of over \$4 billion in economic impact and tens of thousands of well-paying jobs.

As the province moved into Phase 3 of BC's Restart Plan in late June of last year, business meetings and events with no more than 50 attendees also restarted (until further restrictions were imposed in December), similar to other segments of society including schools. This has been cautiously achieved in accordance with the [BC Meetings & Events COVID-19 Safe Restart Guidelines](#) the [British Columbia Hotel Association's COVID-19 Recovery & Guidelines](#), and specific venue protocols. Thanks to robust contact tracing abilities, we know that, to date, not a single COVID-19 case has been linked to one of these events.

Given that BC meetings and events had been operating successfully under Stage One conditions from April until December 2020,

we believe this to be a successful 'pilot' phase that supports the viability of a graduated re-opening of the sector in a safe way, thereby putting people back to work and helping the Province's economy recover.

Because business meetings and events are highly-planned, tightly-controlled gatherings, they should be viewed as a low-risk way to reactivate the tourism industry. These functions are professionally organized, exclusive to invitees only, require behavioural compliance, use purpose-built facilities with robust health and safety protocols in place, involve strict risk mitigation plans, and are hosted by organizations held to account by corporate governance, protocols, social responsibilities, and commitments to their communities and workforces.



Photo Credit: Brad Kasselmann

Executive Summary

Continued

The BC Meetings & Events Restart Plan proposes that the business meetings and events industry resumes as part of a four-stage graduated process. Each stage increases the number of attendees permitted within a range, the types of meetings and events that can be held, and the activities that participants can engage in. Strategic, incremental growth on a monthly or bi-monthly basis (within and between stages) is proposed based on continuous monitoring of these functions, along with regular 30-day assessments by the Provincial Health Officer. At all stages, events would be restricted to purpose-built venues such as hotels and convention centres compliant with strict health and safety protocols specific to business meetings and events.



Photo Credit: Vision Photo

Stage One was essentially in effect until December when meetings and events for up to 50 people were permitted. Our goal is to return to Stage One early in Q1, 2021, or as early as deemed appropriate by public health authorities. The focus would be on local/BC audiences only.

Stage Two would allow for meetings & events with over 50 people and potentially graduating to 100 people. Again, the focus would be a local BC audience only. (Beginning Q1, 2021 dependent on Provincial COVID-19 management objectives).

Stage Three would allow for meetings & events with 100 people, potentially graduating to 250 people. This assumes that contract tracing apps are widely available, and the possibility of rapid testing. The hope would be to graduate to an inter-provincial audience, Canadian attendees only. (Beginning in Q2, 2021 dependent on Provincial COVID-19 management objectives).

Stage Four would allow for meetings and events with 250 people, potentially graduating to 500+ people. This assumes that rapid testing and access to a vaccine is widely available. Audiences would be national and if border restrictions are eased, some international. (Beginning in Q3, 2021 dependent on Provincial COVID-19 management objectives).

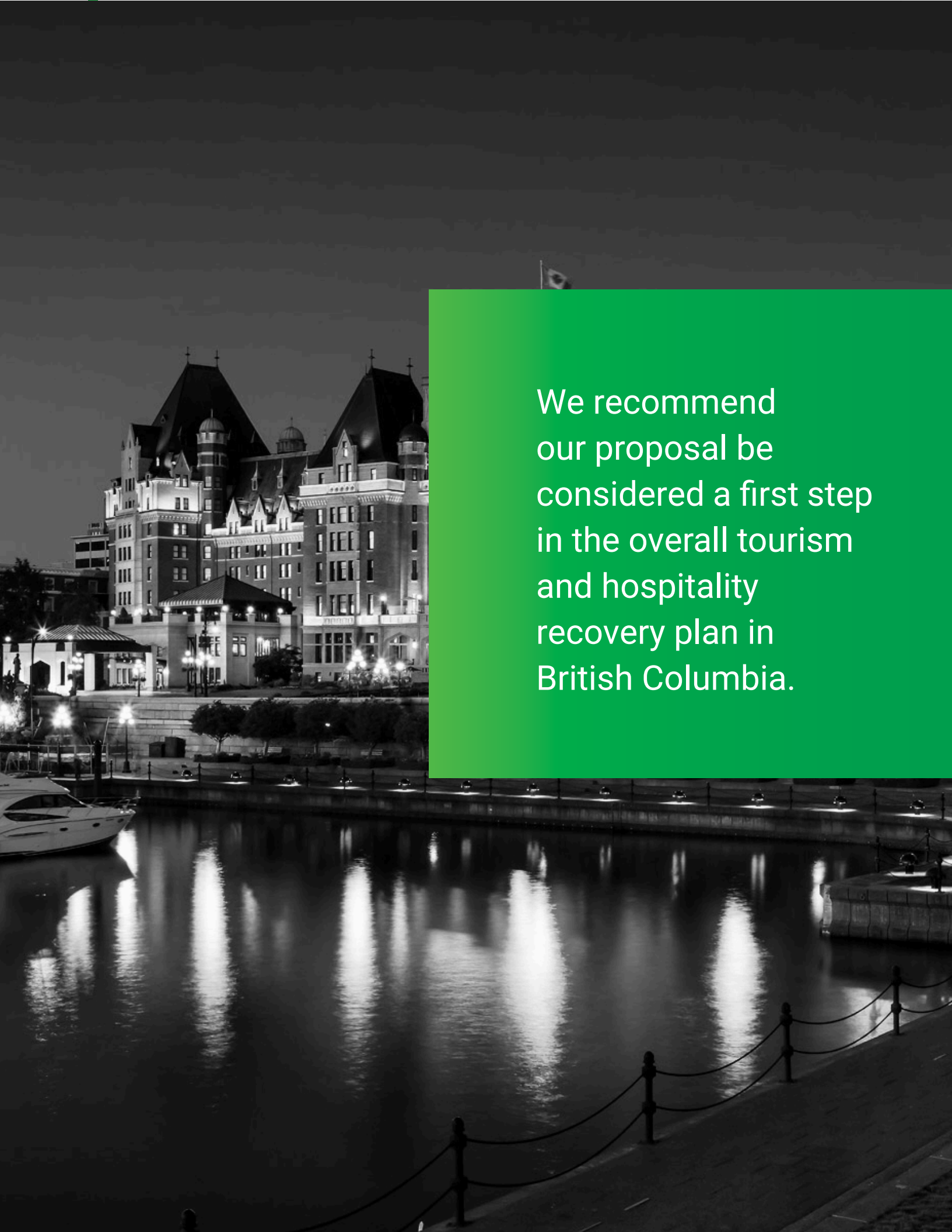
Executive Summary

Continued

With strict industry compliance and oversight, professional planning and management, and ongoing dialogue and cooperation with our province's health authorities, it is felt that the BC Meetings & Events Restart Plan can generate

significant economic, industry, innovation, and mental health benefits for the hardest-hit tourism sector, with very low risk to public health or the general public.





We recommend
our proposal be
considered a first step
in the overall tourism
and hospitality
recovery plan in
British Columbia.

Introduction

This BC Meetings & Events Safe Restart Plan is being submitted under Section 43 of the Public Health Act (specific to the 50-person limit for gatherings) with the conviction that it offers a strategic and graduated approach to re-opening the BC Meetings & Events Industry while protecting the health and safety of residents, workers and attendees in accordance with provincial health orders and directives. If implemented properly, we have full confidence that a strong recovery will take place in accordance with market demand. It is our hope that this plan creates the opportunity for dialogue with the Provincial Health Officer to further discuss how we can move forward.

Safely re-opening the BC Meetings & Events Industry offers key benefits to our Province as we re-build our economy, our integral tourism sector, and the mental health of our communities. We can start bringing back to work the tens of thousands of British Columbians who have lost their jobs because of the collapse of the meetings & events industry, and the hundreds of small- and medium-sized businesses that have lost 85% to 100% of their projected revenues for 2020. Re-starting the meetings & events industry will also reopen the larger tourism sector, an important economic driver for BC. Along with stimulating economic growth, this will also address the significant mental health challenges facing those that have lost their income and businesses, as well as the

larger workforce which has been impacted by the loss of opportunities to meet colleagues and fellow professionals in a business environment.

We submit that Business Meetings & Events represent a critical part of corporate governance and information exchanges, and as such should be deemed distinct from non-essential, social events

This plan is based on the overall principle that gatherings defined as business meetings & events are planned and executed by professional meeting planners, organizers or facilitators, and follow accepted best practices and guidelines with both controlled environments and controlled behaviours that align with COVID-19 health and safety protocols. Moreover, the approach also assumes that the origin of event attendees aligns with the accepted provincial and federal travel recommendations.



Photo Credit: Fairmont Empress

Introduction

Continued

Business meetings & events differ substantially from other types of gatherings in their inherent levels of accountability and compliance. There is a high degree of influence that can be exerted over all four levels of COVID-19 **protective control measures** through following [established industry protocols](#) and specific COVID-19 Risk Mitigation Plans. Business meetings & events are typically planned by qualified meeting and event professionals and are hosted and attended by business organizations with a responsibility towards safety and ethics. By definition, they are not public gatherings, but instead closed to the public with attendance by invite only, designed to conduct business. They are typically held in purpose-built meeting spaces such as hotels and conference/convention centres, with adequate HVAC systems. These events are designed with spacious floor plans, purpose-chosen furniture and barriers, and include systems for controlling traffic flow and participant behaviour. Because these events are by invitation only, there are control systems to gather detailed, accurate data for contact tracing and enforce behavioural compliance at all levels, restricting social interaction. In this respect, business meetings and events have more in common with schools and educational institutions than they do with social gatherings.

The provision of stages in this proposal is intended to facilitate a logical, **cautious and gradual progression** toward fewer

restrictions and larger meetings and events to support economic activities within the sector. In order to provide a starting point, we have assumed Stage One as the current period (prior to recently imposed restrictions), which has been in effect since April 2020 with no reported cases of COVID-19 resulting from such meetings or events. Our working assumption is that this phase effectively represents a “pilot” test case for our industry which has, to date, demonstrated successful operations under our industry’s current [best practice guidelines and risk mitigation protocols](#).

We recommend our proposal be considered a first step in the overall tourism and hospitality recovery plan in British Columbia. By gradually easing restrictions on gathering size in this tightly-controlled environment where compliance is a top priority for business meetings & events, we can safely jump-start the wider tourism economy, leading the way for other sectors to follow suit.

BC Meetings & Events 2020 Survey

A survey was conducted on over 125 meetings of under 50 persons that were operated by BC meeting planners and venues since March, 2020. 100% of the meetings that incorporated the [BC Meetings & Events COVID-19 Safe Restart Guidelines](#) reported zero cases of transmission.

[Click Here](#) for survey results.

Concept

Similar to BC's Restart Plan, each stage of the graduated BC Meetings & Events Restart Plan provides the necessary guidance for the industry. However, all vendors, suppliers and venues are free to proceed at their own pace of progression, provided they follow the guidance and orders of the Provincial Health Officer and WorkSafeBC.

Our own working group represents a diverse cross-section of the BC Meetings & Events Industry, and as with the existing [BC Meetings & Events COVID-19 Safe Restart Guidelines](#), this plan has been developed with input from the Provincial Health Office's Safer Operations Working Group, WorkSafeBC, the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture & Sport, as well as in collaboration with the Metro Vancouver Tourism Industry & Hospitality Response & Recovery Task Force, and the BC Hotel Association.

Progressing to ascending stages will primarily be gauged on successfully

executing meetings and events without any incident of consequence. Conversely, identifying and dealing with any cases—including the location, size and severity directly related to a specific event—is paramount to ensuring a single occurrence does not impact the overall sector. It should be noted that progression between stages of the plan would be aligned and done in concert with the same criteria the Province is using to progress through various phases of British Columbia's restart strategy:

- Situational assessment of the pandemic in British Columbia
- Effectiveness of intervention measures in British Columbia and elsewhere
- New scientific knowledge about COVID-19
- Assessment of success levels within current operations

Graduated Restart Plan for the BC Meetings & Event Industry

Our recommended restart plan suggests a four-stage, graduated approach where the maximum number of attendees permitted for business meetings and events is increased by the PHO in phases, according to factored criteria and when all protocols are met. We have suggested a range of maximums within each phase that can be situationally adjusted until the health orders are altered or repealed.

In Stage One—the 50-person maximum phase, which we experienced from the onset of the pandemic and which was paused just prior to the submission of this proposal —events were already taking place in accordance with the provincial health orders, the [BC Meetings & Events COVID-19 Safe Restart Guidelines](#), the [BCHA COVID-19 Recovery & Guidelines](#) and specific venue protocols. Essentially, when these guidelines are followed, transmission should not occur.



Graduated Restart Plan for the BC Meetings & Event Industry

Suggested Implementation

01

Initial meeting between PHO and BC Meetings & Events Industry Working Group to review this Restart Plan and supporting data.

02

PHO approves plan and implementation of Stage One of the following plan within Q1, 2021, allowing business meetings and events up to 50 participants while still abiding by all other COVID-19 protocols.

03

PHO agrees to 30-day regular assessments with the BC Meetings & Events Industry Working Group and BC Hotel Association to review effectiveness of the plan, industry compliance and the graduating criteria, as outlined below.

04

PHO approves progression through each stage as early as safely possible, using agreed upon guidelines for scaling up or down through stages, and graduating criteria. Proposed target dates for progression are included below.

Further Recommendations

1. The PHO will supply data of any reports of transmission attributed to business meetings and events held within the past 30 days and will compare this with the industry's own data.
2. Every event safety plan must comply with PHO health orders and be made available upon request to the PHO, WorkSafe BC, and local health authorities.
3. If the PHO deems it necessary, a system of registering events with the PHO, WorkSafe BC or local health authorities will be activated.

Graduated Restart Plan

Graduating Criteria at Each Stage

All COVID-19 Risk Mitigation Protocols must be met

- Zero-reported transmission of COVID-19 attributed to business meetings and events
- Acceptably managed controls of any reported cases at business meetings and events to the PHO/local health authorities
- Strict adherence to Provincial Health Officer orders, including those specific to business meetings and events
- Strict compliance with proper health, safety and risk mitigation protocols as outlined in the [BC Meetings & Events COVID-19 Safe Restart Guidelines](#), and to hotel/venue protocols. These guidelines are built to be scalable, relevant to each proposed stage above.

Other factors for consideration, outside of the meetings and events industry:

- Situational assessment of the pandemic in British Columbia
- Effectiveness of intervention measures in British Columbia and elsewhere
- New scientific knowledge about COVID-19
- Assessment of success levels within current operations

Graduated Restart Plan

Stage 1

April – December 31, 2020 (PILOT PHASE)

situation immediately prior to December restrictions

Target Restart Date

Q1, 2021, or when permitted under provincial health orders

Max Gathering Size:

50 persons.

Attendee Origin:

Hyper local.

Venues:

Purpose-built venues ie. hotels, conference centres and designated meeting facilities.

Event Type:

Small business meetings only;
no planned social activities.

NOTE: *socializing outside of business meetings is strongly discouraged by organizers and sponsors per provincial health orders and recommendations.*

Situation Overview:

- Borders closed
- 14-day quarantine in effect for international travellers

Stage One represents the most recent situation with organized gatherings across the province for up to **50 patrons (April – Dec)**, according to the [current provincial health orders](#).*

Since there were no known cases of COVID-19 transmission within the meetings and events sector during this stage, it should be considered the **pilot phase**, demonstrating safe operations and tracing capabilities while supporting growing government and consumer confidence based on proven success grounded in the risk mitigation protocols and best practices currently being adhered to. These include all event partners holding detailed safety plans according to [BC Meetings & Events COVID-19 Safe Restart Guidelines](#) and aligned with *WorkSafe BC* inspection criteria.

This **pilot phase** has allowed industry to prove competency in order to scale necessary protocols (physical distancing, use of masks, sanitization, spatial design, people-movement) and contact tracing capabilities for subsequent phases.

***NOTE:** To our knowledge, to date, and according to [recent survey results](#), there have been no reported cases of COVID-19 transmission related to any business meetings or events held under the Stage One conditions.

Graduated Restart Plan

Stage 2

Target Start Date

Q2, 2021, or when permitted under provincial health orders

Max Gathering Size:

50-100 persons.

Attendee Origin:

Hyper local, provincial.

Venues:

Purpose-built venues ie. hotels, conference centres and designated meeting facilities.

Event Type:

Small business meetings only;
no planned social activities.

NOTE: *socializing outside of business meetings is strongly discouraged by organizers and sponsors per provincial health orders and recommendations.*

Anticipated Situation:

- Borders closed
- 14-day quarantine in effect for international travellers
- Rapid testing pilot projects underway
- Customized contact tracing applications available for events and local communities

Stage Two could effectively begin in **Q2, 2021** if and when current restrictions are lifted, and given that the activities under current restrictions on gatherings for the professional meetings and events sector have proven to be effective in preventing community outbreaks and widespread transmission. Stage Two would thus represent an increase in the maximum allowable number of patrons from **50 to 100** per event, so long as all graduating criteria are met.

Strategic, incremental growth on a monthly or bi-monthly basis (**e.g. 75-100**) is proposed based on continuous monitoring of meetings and events, along with **regular 30-day assessments** by the Provincial Health Officer.

NOTE: Moving to Stage Three and Stage Four would be with the understanding that larger events would only be held in compliant venues such as hotels and professionally operated, purpose-built structures with adequate HVAC and strict COVID-19 protocols in place, such as conference /convention centres and designated meeting facilities.

Graduated Restart Plan

Stage 3

Target Start Date

Q3, 2021, or when permitted under provincial health orders

Max Gathering Size:

100-250 persons.

Attendee Origin:

Local, inter-provincial and national.

Venues:

Purpose-built venues ie. hotels, conference centres and designated meeting facilities.

Event Type:

Business meetings, company educational/learning retreats, limited social engagements such as meal functions, awards ceremonies, etc. as permitted by provincial health orders and recommendations.

Anticipated Situation:

- Borders restricted to specific countries/conditions
- Rapid testing and vaccine availability
- Extensive contact tracing apps widely available

Graduation to Stage Three would see an increase to **100-250** attendees permitted per event, contingent on the continued successful track record of hosting meetings and events. In this stage, we anticipate the introduction of rapid testing and additional contact tracing measures, as well as early vaccine applications to support the mitigation of community transmission.

With the availability of these additional support measures, this stage would require ongoing physical distancing measures plus additional attention to venue air flow/filtration. At the same time, it could allow an increase in the percentage or intensity of social interaction in accordance with recommendations of the PHO, and in alignment with BC's Restart Strategy. In this stage, we anticipate the need for adequate air flow and high space ratios to accommodate attendees responsibly. Therefore, as part of our safety commitment, we recommend only purpose-built spaces such as accredited hotels, convention centres and defined meeting structures are utilized for these larger groups.

Strategic, incremental growth on a monthly or bi-monthly basis (**e.g. 100-150; 150-200; 200-250**) is proposed based on continuous monitoring of meetings & events, along with **regular 30-day assessments** by the Provincial Health Officer.

Graduated Restart Plan

Stage 4

Target Start Date

Q4, 2021, or when permitted under provincial health orders

Max Gathering Size:

250-500+ persons.

Attendee Origin:

Local, inter-provincial and national;
US/international subject to border restrictions.

Venues:

Purpose-built venues ie. hotels, conference centres and designated meeting facilities.

Event Type:

Business meetings, company retreats, meal functions, awards ceremonies, teambuilding and social functions as permitted by provincial health orders and recommendations.

Anticipated Situation:

- Borders restrictions eased (some limitations)
- Rapid testing widely available
- At least one of:
 - Widespread vaccination, or
 - Community immunity, or
 - Broad successful treatments

In alignment with BC's Restart Plan, Stage Four allows for business meetings and events potentially between **250-500+** to meet and gather, and the ability to welcome international delegates when national and international case numbers decline.

In the absence of widespread vaccination, community immunity or successful treatments, it is recommended that we continue to incrementally grow the size and scope of events as outlined in Stage Three, based on successful monitoring, **30-day regular assessments**, and the continued safe execution of meetings and events.

Graduated Restart Plan

Scaling Up or Down Within Each Stage

- Strategic, incremental growth on a monthly or bi-monthly basis within each stage is proposed based on continuous monitoring of meetings & events.
- **Regular 30-day assessments** by the Provincial Health Officer to gauge the potential to scale up or down as the situation permits.

British Columbia is fortunate to have excellent authoritative health and safety guidance. To that end, the industry is committed to following PHO advice, adjustments and recommendations to this plan as we navigate through various stages of the pandemic in our province.

The proposed dates and maximum number of attendees listed within each stage are what we believe to be reasonable and manageable recommendations given the context of controlled environments, while recognizing that we are not scientific or medical experts.





Key Benefits of Graduated Restart of Meetings & Events

Some key benefits of our proposal to gradually ease restrictions on gathering numbers, specific to business meetings and events

Key Benefit #1

Jumpstart for the Overall Tourism & Hospitality Industry

- Restarting business meetings and events as a first phase recovery strategy for the sector will safely and gradually open up the tourism economy in a carefully managed way by first allowing strictly controlled gatherings for business purposes, before introducing larger, less controlled events such as large conventions, sporting events, social celebrations and live festivals. This plan can provide the opportunity for the industry to survive until travel resumes in earnest in a safe way.
- Allow thousands of laid-off workers to return to work in those businesses that provide services to the meetings and events industry.
- Drive business to hotels, purpose-built meeting venues such as conference and convention centres, and the countless related companies province-wide such as those offering meeting and event planning and management; audio visual and lighting; stage, set and décor; furniture rental; food & beverage services; promotional products and gifting; and marketing and graphic design, etc.
- Help facilitate industry survival through this challenging period of shut-down so that British Columbia will emerge in a competitive position with a tourism industry fully prepared to attract meeting and event business once restrictions are eventually lifted and the industry begins to rebound.



Key Benefit #2

Innovation & Business Development for the Corporate Sector

- Allow corporations in all sectors of the economy to bring work colleagues, business leaders and communities together to drive innovation, education and development.
- Allow companies to engage their teams and enhance corporate culture through safe and responsible in-person interaction and experiences.



Key Benefit #3

Social Recovery - Improving Mental Health & Wellness for Workforces

Supplier side: Create jobs and allow people to get back to work to help alleviate the negative societal effects of unemployment such as depression, anxiety, financial and emotional stress, addiction, etc.

Corporate side: In-person engagement and connection through responsibly managed business meetings and events plays a part in alleviating the effects of working from home, such as social isolation, loneliness, online exhaustion, lack of healthy movement and routine.



Case Studies

Business meetings and events were recently being held in BC (with 50 attendees or less), across Canada and around the world. Planners are safety-focused by trade and training, and layering components beyond basic expectations is a hallmark of this profession. The meetings and events industry is working diligently, across provinces and nations, to enforce risk mitigation practices to ensure no cases of COVID-19 are transmitted

at these events. Furthermore, the requirement for registration allows planners to have immediate access to full contact information in the event of a reported case that requires tracing.

Events with under 50 attendees have safely taken place across BC, implementing best practices, working within current PHO restrictions, and reporting zero spread of COVID-19, reflected in a [recent survey](#). Here are a few examples:

Event	Location	Date (2020)	#PAX	COVID-19 Status	Case Study
BC Hospitality Foundation Event	Vancouver	July	<50	No spread	View
MPI September Event	Vancouver	September	45	No spread	View
PDS Executive Retreat	Whistler	September	48	No spread	View
Tourism Vancouver AGM	Vancouver	October	<50	No spread	View

Examples of Industry Preparedness

Tourism Kelowna

Ready for Business Meetings
& Events

[Watch Video](#)

Fairmont Chateau Whistler

Meet Well commitment to keeping
gatherings safe

[Watch Video](#)

ALHI Meetings

Back to Business Experiential
Forum - The Path Forward

[Watch Video](#)

NOTE: Please watch the full
4 minutes



Photo Credit: Vision Photo

Distinctions Between Business Meetings & Events and Other Mass Gatherings

First and foremost, business meetings and events are typically organized and managed by experienced event professionals who are employed or hired by the host organization.

These professional organizers and associated service providers have years of experience designing and orchestrating safe and responsible events according to industry standards, and with corporate and social governance. The majority are members of national and international professional industry associations offering training and accreditation (see below).

The health and safety requirements of COVID-19 are an added protective layer to the already existing risk mitigation plans that make up standard industry operating procedures. Creative problem solving, innovative thinking, logistics management and adaptable design are fundamentals in the meetings & events industry.

[Watch ALHI Video](#)

NOTE: Please watch the full 4 minutes

Event Objectives

- Professional in nature, business meetings and events are purposeful gatherings designed to facilitate education, innovation, and knowledge exchange in contrast to events held strictly for social or entertainment purposes. These functions afford a much higher degree of behavioural control than public tradeshow, festivals, concerts and sporting events, as well as social gatherings such as weddings and parties with friends and family.



Photo Credit: Sheraton Wall Centre

Distinctions Between Business Meetings & Events and Other Mass Gatherings

Continued

Controlled Environments, Closed to the Public

- Business meetings and events traditionally take place in controlled environments that are not open to the public.
- They are held in privately booked spaces and venues that are professionally operated in purpose-built establishments such as hotel and conference centre spaces, corporate offices and other legitimate meeting and event venues with established and extensive safety and operational protocols.
- Attendees are part of a closed group of invited and pre-registered attendees where detailed personal contact information is collected and stored for access, enabling immediate contact tracing if required.
- The attendees are connected through employment or business affiliations with companies and organizations that are responsible for the safe planning and execution of these events.

Attendee Demographic:

- Attendees are typically from the same company, organization, industry or working group.
- Attendees are typically conditioned to following pre-planned agendas and company protocols, as well as receiving direct, detailed communication, messaging and instruction both in advance of and during the meeting or event.



Distinctions Between Business Meetings & Events and Other Mass Gatherings

Continued

Professionally Designed, Planned, Orchestrated and Controlled

- Every aspect of a business event is typically pre-planned, executed and monitored by professional teams. Environments are designed to control behaviours and to promote safety.
- Professional planners are sought after for expertise well beyond design capabilities and logistics know-how, having a very intentional focus towards safety, risk mitigation and emergency protocols; layering contingency plans into the overall project plan is exactly why professional planners are valued. This differentiates a professional meeting planner from a social 'party planner.' Our industry is aware of the oversight required by planners when it comes to keeping attendees safe and adhering to our BC's public health orders.
- The design and layout of business meetings and events is always digitized using technology that enables "to-scale" drawings to be prepared in advance, and customization for scope and group size to the space allowing for physical distancing, crowd control, health, safety and hygiene measures.
- Professional planners work to integrate mitigation and risk control measures such as access and flow, space delineation and design, information signage, verbal, visual and written communication channels into their venue configuration plans.
- Professional planners use extensive app-based technology for communication of information and collection of personal data.



Distinctions Between Business Meetings & Events and Other Mass Gatherings

Continued

Social Interaction and Behaviour Controls

- The degree of social interaction can be customized and is designed in advance, with risk mitigation and behaviour control measures in place allowing for the ability to collect and make available detailed contact tracing information.
- Business meetings and events, by design, ensure far better compliance with accepted protocols than would be possible in a public setting or other gatherings such as concerts, festivals, sporting events, and family gatherings.

Accountability, Corporate & Social Responsibility

- Business meetings and events are sponsored and hosted by a corporation or professional organization held to account by corporate governance, protocols, social responsibilities, and commitments to their communities and workforces.
- Clients, suppliers and venues have established corporate safety and travel protocols which add yet another layer of protection to overall event mitigation plans.
- Behavioural compliance in accordance with required health and safety protocols can be addressed, messaged, and committed to in advance.
- Compliance can be monitored during the event, and anyone found negligent of stated requirements can be easily removed from the premises.

Distinctions Between Business Meetings & Events and Other Mass Gatherings

Continued

Industry Oversight

- Companies servicing meetings and events are typically members of regionally and globally recognized industry organizations and global brands with set standards and guidelines of operation, many of which provide and/or require professional accreditation. Examples of some associations with active chapters in BC include:
 - [PCMA – Professional Convention Management Association](#)
 - [MPI – Meeting Professionals International](#)
 - [ILEA – International Live Events Association](#)
 - [SITE – Society for Incentive Travel Excellence](#)
 - [MMBC – Meetings Mean Business Canada](#)
 - [FVEPA - Fraser Valley Event Planning Association](#)
 - [BCHA – BC Hotel Association](#)
 - [CCC - Convention Centres of Canada](#)
- The BC Meetings & Events Industry has a proven track record of producing world-class events for audiences of all sizes in a safe, responsible and controlled manner. Planners, producers, designers, technicians and all manner of event employees are accustomed to working within stringent workplace protocols and guidelines.
- With the current COVID-19 restrictions in

place in BC, meeting and event planners are already designing meeting spaces specifically with physical distancing requirements, safe density ratios, capacity restrictions and health & hygiene protocols and communication. The high-level of responsibility our industry and our clients have to their communities and workforces is indicative to the level of concern and seriousness taken in the approach toward COVID-19 health and safety protocols.

- Professional meeting planners have a high commitment to 'getting it right' and there is a great deal of communication internationally and across communities to share what is working and what isn't. One example of this is contained in this article by [MPI – Meeting Professionals International](#). Our industry has a vested interest in learning from one another and anticipating concerns in what will eventually be the resumption of in-person (and hybrid) events in larger numbers. The largest factor we will come up against is human behaviour and the varying degrees of concern individuals have for risk and risk mitigation.
- Strategies and tools are being constantly updated and shared with a commitment to collaboration and communication so that our best practices are evolving along with attendee attitudes and public assessment of risk when it comes to travel and gatherings.

Distinctions Between Business Meetings & Events and Other Mass Gatherings

Continued

Industry Compliance

- Extensive Risk Mitigation Plans address all aspects of attendee and staff interactions, flow, communication, hygiene, food & beverage management, etc., with strict adherence to the [BC Meetings & Events COVID-19 Safe Restart Guidelines](#) and those of the venues in which the events are held.
 - These guidelines were developed with input and review provided by the PHO's Safer Operations Working Group and WorkSafeBC.
 - Built into the guidelines is the premise that these are a resource tool from which to inform and guide the development of specific risk mitigation plans on a per-event basis. This keeps the responsibility on the planner, host venue and client to assess and manage risk responsibly, addressing each unique gathering as an independent source of potential risk, with unique solutions designed for each.
 - These guidelines have been distributed by our industry's professional associations and endorsed by hundreds of our provincial business community members.
- These guidelines acknowledge that the planner/vendor risk mitigation plans and protocols must be in concert with those of the client and the venue.
- As we stay on top of current information and knowledge, our industry will adapt mitigation plans accordingly. We believe the information in these guidelines is scalable and continues to reflect the appropriate response in light of the newest pandemic information. Examples of industry-endorsed protocols are:
 - British Columbia:**
 - [BC Meetings & Events COVID-19 Safe Restart Guidelines](#)
 - [BCHA COVID-19 Recovery & Guidelines](#)
 - Global:**
 - [The Event Safety Alliance Reopening Guide](#)
 - [G3 Good Practice Guidance: Addressing COVID-19 Requirements for Opening Business Event Version 2](#)

Situational Background

Ripple Effect of the Pandemic on the Meetings & Events Industry

The BC Meetings & Events Industry has been a significant economic driver for tourism and hospitality both in British Columbia and across Canada. Our sector produces world-class meetings, conferences and events. We welcome people, companies, and organizations from BC, across Canada and from around the world, facilitating meeting and engagement within our spectacular destinations.

Necessary restrictions imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have had immediate and severe consequences on the global meetings and events industry. As one of the first sectors to be shut down, it is also one of the hardest hit, and is slated to be among the last to recover.

While the drastic decline in business travel has had a devastating impact on hotels, restaurants, and conference centres, hundreds of small- and medium-sized businesses servicing the meetings and events sector in BC have also been severely affected.

Examples of these companies include:

- event production companies
- meeting and event planners
- destination, conference and exhibition management companies
- caterers, food & beverage suppliers
- technical designers
- A/V and lighting specialists
- event and decor designers
- furniture rental companies
- promotional products and gifting companies
- set designers and construction companies
- entertainment companies
- artists & performers
- tenting and rental suppliers

The ripple effect goes beyond the tourism and hospitality industry. Business meetings and events also stimulate economic growth in virtually every other business sector by providing forums for academic, educational and business interactions, which in turn facilitate innovation, creativity and professional advancement. As such, they can provide a platform for organizations to evaluate and adapt to the expectations and priorities of a post-pandemic business environment through collaboration, engagement, and knowledge exchange in immediate and efficient ways.

Economic Impact

Thousands of meetings & events have been cancelled across British Columbia since March 2020, resulting in over **\$4 billion+** in **economic loss** for the industry in our province. The impact on all industry sectors has resulted in **tens of thousands of lost jobs**. Hotels, conference centres and hundreds of small- and medium-sized businesses that service the meetings and events industry have reported losing 85% to 100% of their projected revenues to the end of 2020. With current restrictions and low consumer confidence, similar losses will continue well into 2021.

The path toward tourism and hospitality recovery will be long. It will take years to resume to pre-COVID level revenues, and capacity restrictions are likely to be with us for the mid-term future. Gradually restarting responsibly managed business meetings and events can provide a safe mechanism to help facilitate engagement and corporate spending at a time when it is needed most. The inherent nature of this sector presents a controlled and tightly managed environment to initiate a first phase reopening of BC's overall visitor economy. In turn, this will build confidence in safe and responsible operations within the tourism & hospitality industry.



Photo Credit: Sheraton Wall Centre Hotel

Impact on the Mental Health & Wellness of Workforces

Within the meeting & event industry, the economic fallout of COVID-19 has resulted in thousands of workers being laid off or subjected to reduced working hours, and in business owners struggling to keep their companies alive with few to zero revenue prospects for the foreseeable future.

For businesses in general, the majority of employees now work from home and have lost the benefit of in-person engagement and a sense of corporate culture in their work lives.

These effects have reportedly led to an increase in anxiety, depression, financial stress, social deprivation, feelings of isolation, and loss of control for many people in all sectors of our economy and communities.

The message sent to our industry in BC's Restart Plan is that our sector will not be able to fully open up until there is an effective vaccine, or herd immunity. This uncertainty profoundly affects the livelihoods, mental health and well-being of British Columbians.

Re-opening meetings and events safely and responsibly can help alleviate these social impacts. We can get people back to work and support local industry towards readiness, resiliency, and sustainability. We can gather and engage with colleagues through safe and responsible in-person business meetings and events. We can bring positive connectivity and creativity back into the lives of workforces across the province.



Photo Credit: Fairmont Pacific Rim

Restart Requires Long Lead Time

The business cycle for meetings and events is long, often involving a minimum of six to twelve+ months of planning prior to delivering an event. The BC Meetings & Events Industry cannot immediately restart in the same way as other businesses such as restaurants or retail.

Revising restrictions on allowable gathering size through a graduated approach will be the impetus for businesses and groups to start planning meetings and events again. Once restrictions are eased, it will take many months to re-tool, build client confidence and start seeing economic recovery. There is urgency for a phased, safe re-opening as soon as possible.



Photo Credit: Brad Kasselmann

Sustainability of the Industry

Once the province entered Phase 3 of BC's Restart Plan, there was a slow emergence of small meetings and events for 50 people or less (prior to the restrictions imposed in December). Unfortunately, the resumption of these events under the current restrictions will not support significant economic recovery or sustainability in the industry. Without a plan to re-open on a larger scale, the viability of our industry and job recovery is in imminent danger of survival.

We are already seeing businesses having to close permanently while others are struggling to survive. Our provincial economy needs our tourism industry to be alive and healthy as we emerge from this pandemic, rather than only just beginning to rebuild in a post-pandemic economy. We need a steady, graduated and safe recovery strategy that begins now.

Because business meetings and events are operated in an extremely professional, controlled and safe environment in which scalability can be tightly managed (unlike family and public gatherings), this sector offers ideal conditions for the first step of re-opening in a phased recovery strategy for the overall visitor economy.



Photo Credit: Sheraton Wall Centre Hotel



Summary

In the same way that schools, restaurants, hotels and grocery stores have adapted to operate safely, meetings and events have also adapted safely by implementing appropriate physical distancing, health and safety measures, contact tracing and enhanced crowd control protocols to successfully plan and execute events for under 50 people.

The strategy proposed within this submission allows for an increased number of attendees permitted, an evolution of the types of meetings and events that can take place, and a progression in the activities planned therein. By restarting responsibly, our important sector will not only put people back to work and help our economy recover, it will also help build confidence in British Columbia as a safe place to meet.

Anticipating that our industry's professionalism, capabilities and extensive experience are recognized and trusted by health authorities and the Province of BC, we are confident that a BC Meetings & Events Industry restart could take place with a graduated, safe and effective approach.

Appendices

A: Current PHO Health Orders for Gatherings

- [View](#)

B: The BC Meetings & Events Industry Working Group Members

Joanne Burns Millar, CEO
Pacific Destination Services (PDS)

Jennifer Burton DMCP, President
Pacific Destination Services (PDS)

Shawn Cheng, Project Manager
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Matthew Coyne, President
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Dave Gazley, Vice President Meeting
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Matthew Hussack, Vice President,
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