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✓ MESA Conference Design Checklist

Sourced from “MESA’s Meeting Planner Forum” – April 2026 (Theme: “Worth the Trip: Re-designing the Conference Experience for 2026 and Beyond”)

CLARITY: Reduce overwhelm - enable confident choices

Actions

- Consolidate overlapping events and reduce total session volume
- Avoid scheduling similar topics at the same time
- Create clear tracks/themes, but keep flexibility to explore
- Keep sessions short, distinct, and high value
- Communicate simply and consistently (max 1-2 emails/week)
- Clearly state: *why attend, what you’ll gain, who you’ll meet*
- Share agenda early with highlights and short preview content
- Capture attendee preferences at registration
- Recommend sessions and allow pre-selection in advance
- Show who’s attending sessions to support decision-making
- Provide strong on-boarding (welcome experience, first-timer support)
- Improve onsite flow (clear signage, reduced noise, logical layout)
- Use AI/tools to personalise journeys and navigation
- Continuously simplify anything confusing (KISS principle: Keep it Short & Simple)

Measure

- Session attendance vs capacity (overlaps, drop-offs)
- % of attendees pre-selecting sessions
- Email engagement (open/click rates)
- App/navigation friction (search, usage patterns)
- Feedback on “ease of planning” and clarity of value

CONNECTION: Design interactions - don’t leave them to chance

Actions

- Create a welcoming first touchpoint (not just “registration” – Welcome Desk)
- Identify and support first-time attendees early
- Use inclusive language and clear communication throughout
- Design structured networking (small groups, rotations, breakouts)
- Balance with informal/free time for organic interactions
- Offer multiple formats (1:1, small groups, social, wellness activities)
- Make networking opt-in and flexible (respect comfort levels)
- Use badges/app signals to show networking preferences
- Enable attendee profiles (bio + photo) and visibility pre-event
- Recommend connections, but avoid over-filtering
- Encourage attendees to plan who they want to meet
- Introduce buddy systems or “super connectors”

- Create interest-based or niche meetups
- Ensure apps/tools are simple, reliable, and useful
- Extend connection beyond sessions (meetups, follow-ups)

Measure

- Number and quality of connections made
- Participation in networking formats
- App engagement (profiles, messages, meetings set)
- First-time attendee satisfaction
- Diversity of connections (new vs existing contacts)

IMPACT: Deliver value - beyond the event

Actions

- Move passive content to pre-event; use live time for interaction
- Design sessions 50/50 content and discussion
- Prioritise workshops, breakouts, and interactive formats
- Enforce strict timing to protect Q&A and engagement
- Avoid sales-heavy stage content; focus on value
- Schedule and clearly show dedicated networking time (2 hrs/day)
- Enable informal/side meetings as part of the experience
- Use live tools (polls, Q&A, sentiment) to drive participation
- Define clear success metrics (attendee + organiser + exhibitor)
- Align sponsors with meaningful engagement, not just exposure
- Provide personalised post-event outputs (contacts, insights, summaries)
- Enable strong follow-up (lead scoring, prioritisation tools)
- Measure long-term impact (6-9 months, not just immediate feedback)
- Combine pre-, during-, and post-event data for full insight
- Design memorable experiences (social, destination, unexpected moments)
- Refresh formats regularly to keep events fresh and valuable

Measure

- Engagement levels (Q&A, polls, participation rates)
- Post-event actions (meetings, deals, collaborations)
- Long-term impact (6-9-month outcomes)
- Exhibitor ROI (lead quality and conversion)
- Attendee-reported value and behaviour change

Clarity drives decisions → Connection drives engagement → Impact drives return

Thank you to **Tamsin Treasure-Jones**, Co-Founder of **Kubify**, MESA Member, for moderating. Thank you to our keynote speaker: **Nicole Fontein**, Owner of **BlueBox Events**.

We enjoyed 3 Breakout Room sessions focusing on Nicole's three pillars: Clarity / Connection and Impact. Here are the outcomes below. **Nicole Fontein's Slides & White Paper Guide - [Download Here](#)**