

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **MEETING PLANNER SURVEY**

HSP sent a survey to more than 275 meeting planners throughout Wisconsin as well as meeting planners of national associations that could potentially come to Madison. The survey was meant to understand their needs as well as their perceptions of a new convention hotel in Madison. The following is a discussion of results.

Each participant was asked the name of the organization for which they plan meetings. The table below shows examples of some of the responses that were given.

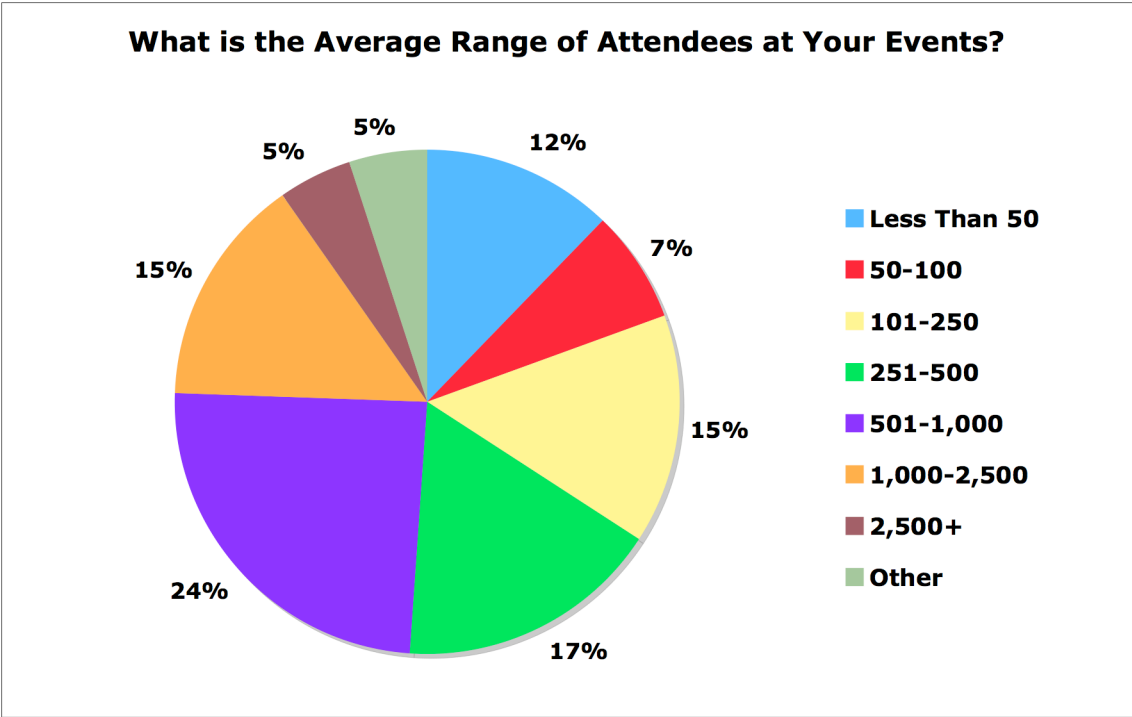
**Table 6-1**

<b>Sample of Meeting Planner Survey Respondents</b>
National Business Media
US Chapter of the International Association for Landscape Ecology (US-IALE)
WEMTA
Society for Industrial Microbiology
AmericInn International, LLC
WEAC
State Bar of Wisconsin
United Way
Wisconsin State SHRM Council
Water Quality Association of WI (WQAW)
Wisconsin Grocers Association (WGA)
Wisconsin Women in Government (WWIG)
Rural Sociological Society
HIMSS Dairyland Chapter
Bouchercon
Pioneer Network
Burk & Associates
SmokeFree Wisconsin
Tobacco Prevention and Control Program
URMIA (University Risk Managers Insurance Association)
Mathematical Association of America
LeMans Corp.
Council of Education Paraprofessionals
Wisconsin School Resource Officers
Wisconsin School Leadership Academy
Association of Wisconsin School Administrators
American Society for Photogrammetry & Remote Sensing
Distance Teaching & Learning Group
Community Bankers of Wisconsin
Source: HSP

Most of the responses given were from state or regional associations, however a number of the respondents planned either social or corporate meetings for national organizations.

The meeting sizes for these different groups vary between small educational/training sessions to large conventions and annual meetings. Below are the responses given when asked the range of attendees for the event(s) that each participant planned.

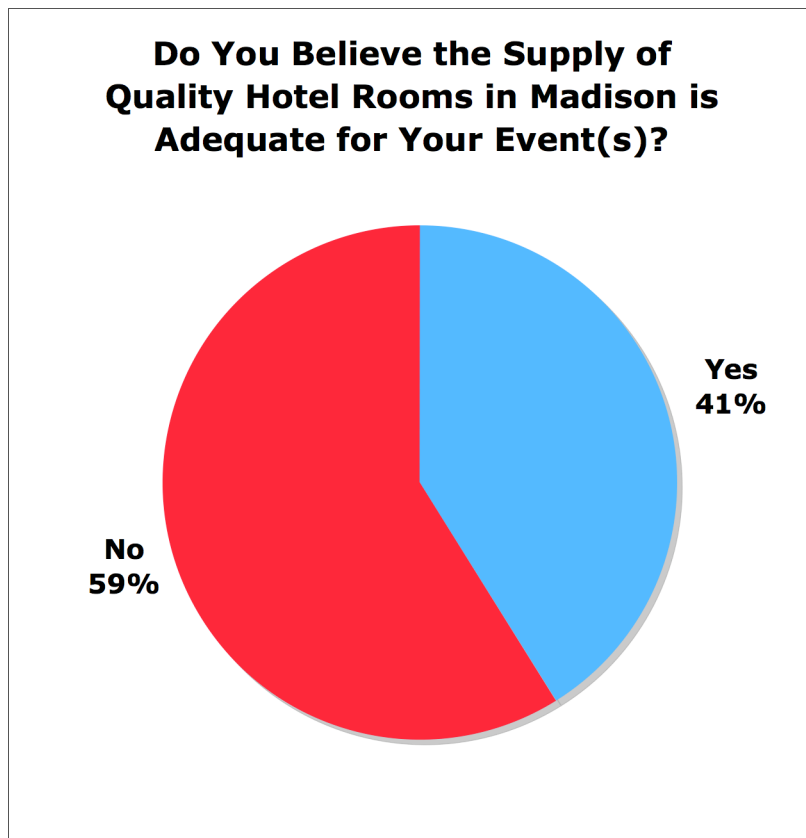
Figure 6-1



More than half of the responses, 57 percent, indicated that the range of attendance was between 250 and 2,500 people. Thirty-four percent reported meetings with less than 250 attendees. Five percent of respondents planned meetings for more than 2,500. These responses show that there are many opportunities to capture large groups of people in Madison.

Participants were next asked a set of questions regarding the conditions of the meeting and hotel market specific to Madison. The first asked if the respondents believed the supply of quality hotel room in Madison was adequate for the meeting(s) they planned.

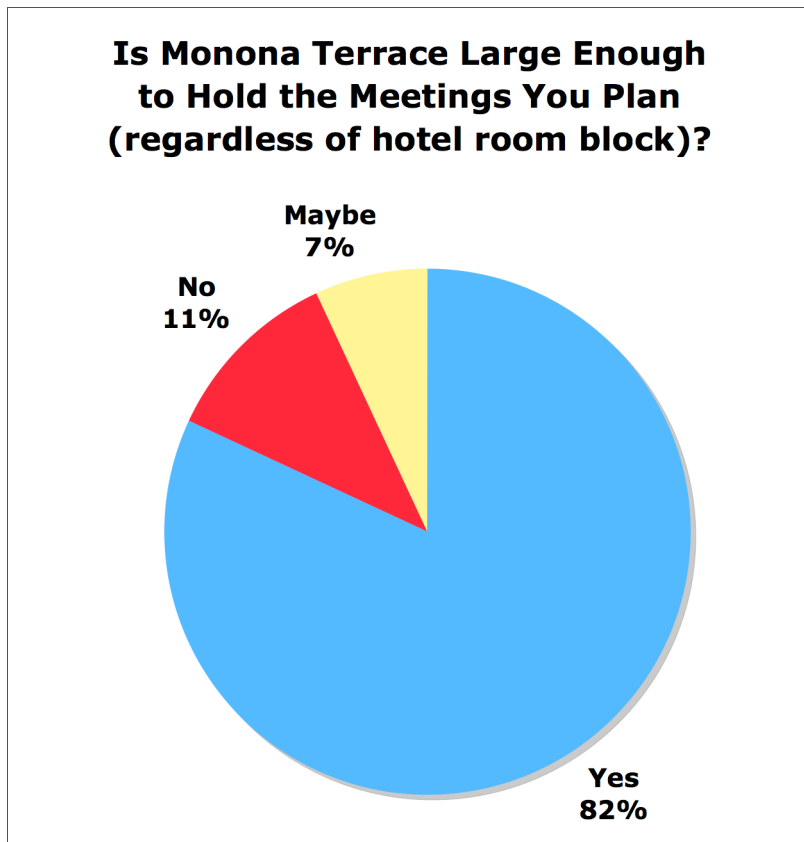
**Figure 6-2**



Nearly 60 percent felt that the supply of quality hotel product in Madison is not adequate. This corresponds to the number of respondents (57%) who plan meetings for 250 or more attendees. Discussions with individual meeting planners and others have shown that first hand visits often provide negative feedback about the quality of some hotel properties in and near downtown.

To understand if Madison is even able attract the meetings that the respondents plan, the next question asked if Monona Terrace is large enough to hold their meetings, regardless of hotel room block.

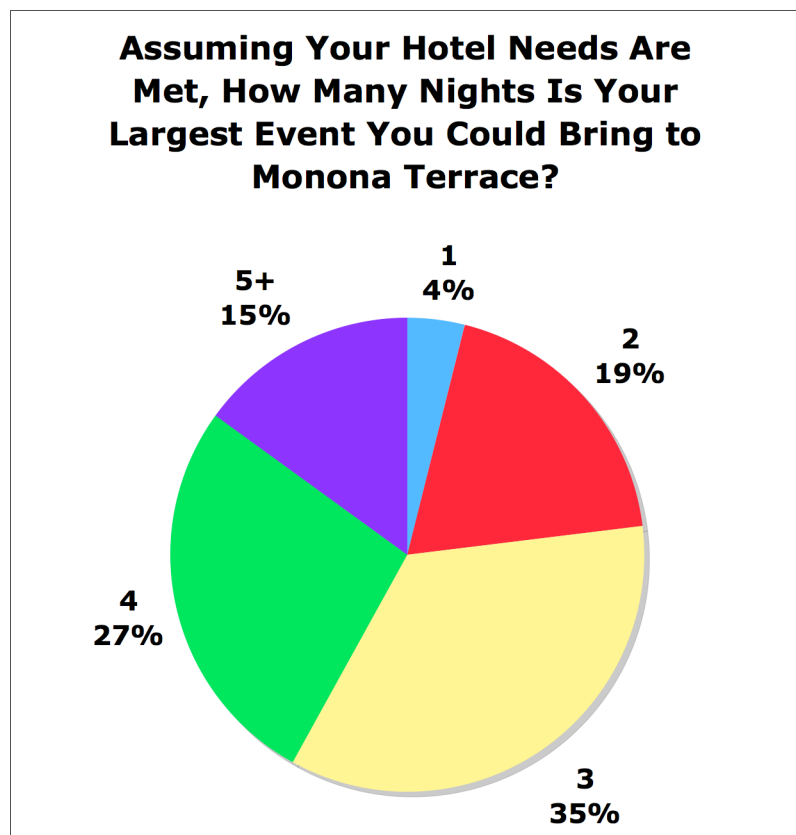
**Figure 6-3**



Most meeting planners, 82 percent, thought that Monona Terrace had adequate space to host meetings. Only 11 percent felt that it is not large enough and the remaining seven percent indicated they were unsure if their group(s) could fit in Monona Terrace. This implies that while Monona Terrace is large enough for most surveyed, most of these same planners do not believe the hotel situation fits their needs.

The next question asked meeting planners to indicate the length of the meetings they could bring to Madison.

**Figure 6-4**



The average length of events that could be held at Monona Terrace is three days, with 42 percent stating a length of four or more days.

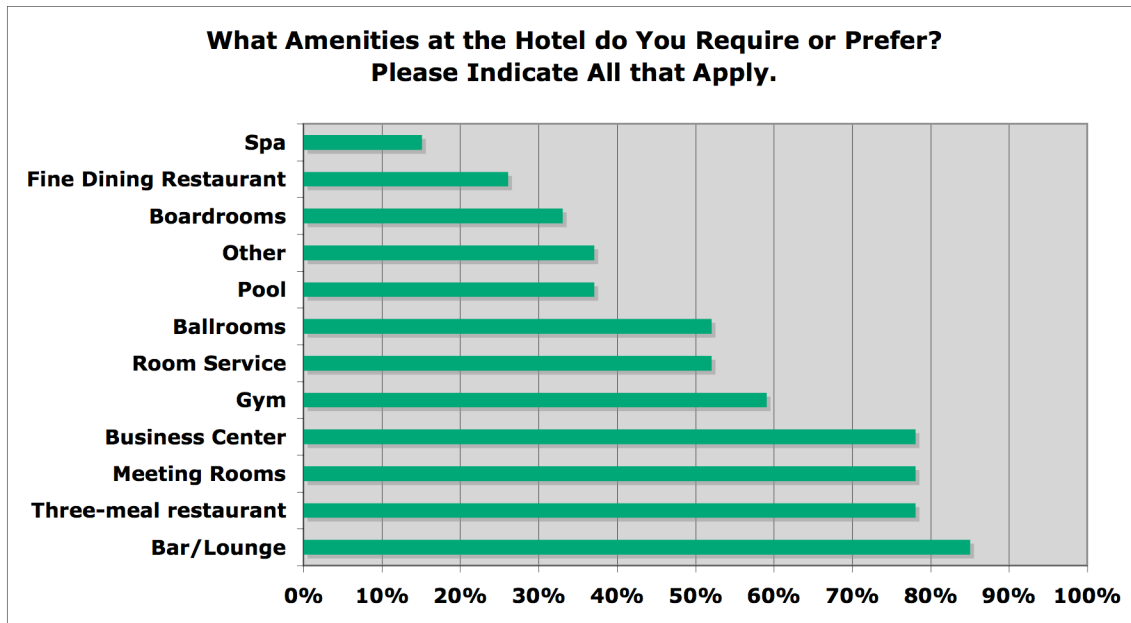
The next set of questions asked were related to the actual amount of space needed for the events that the participants would host in Madison. The responses were as follows:

- In terms of exhibit space, the necessary square footage for the events that the respondents plan ranged from 10,000 to 40,000 square feet of exhibit space, which would be unavailable at the proposed hotel but available at Monona Terrace.
- The minimum amount of ballroom space needed ranged from 1,000 to 18,000 square feet. Respondents indicated that these spaces must be able to comfortably accommodate up to 1,000 people for dining. Based on an average space need of 14 to 16 square feet per person (depending on the need for a dance floor or performance area), this suggests a ballroom of up to 16,000 square feet.
- The number of breakout rooms necessary at a convention facility ranged from two to 20 rooms. A majority of the respondents stated that the ideal

number for the individual meetings that their events required was between four and ten rooms of various sizes.

In addition to the meeting facility being adequate for the needs of the group, the lodging must also meet certain criteria. The next set of questions related to the preferences of overnight accommodations for event planners and their groups.

**Figure 6-5**



The most important hotel amenity to the meeting planners surveyed is the availability of a bar or lounge. The next most important amenities are a three-meal restaurant, business center and the availability of meeting rooms. Although many groups will host their events in a convention or conference center, meeting rooms at the headquarter hotel offer greater flexibility as well as convenience of being in the location where most attendees would be staying overnight. Ballrooms were required by more than half of respondents. These also offer an opportunity for leadership board meetings and related meetings that occur parallel to the conference agenda. Responses in the “other” category were access to high-speed wireless internet and high-end amenities such as golf that can be found in the area but not onsite.

Participants were asked about their room night requirements for the events that they plan.

- Peak room nights are the total amount of room nights that are necessary for the evening(s) of the event with the largest number of overnight visitors. The peak number of rooms that are needed by respondents for their large events ranged from less than 50 to 500+ rooms. The majority of the planners stated that more than 400 rooms is an ideal room count

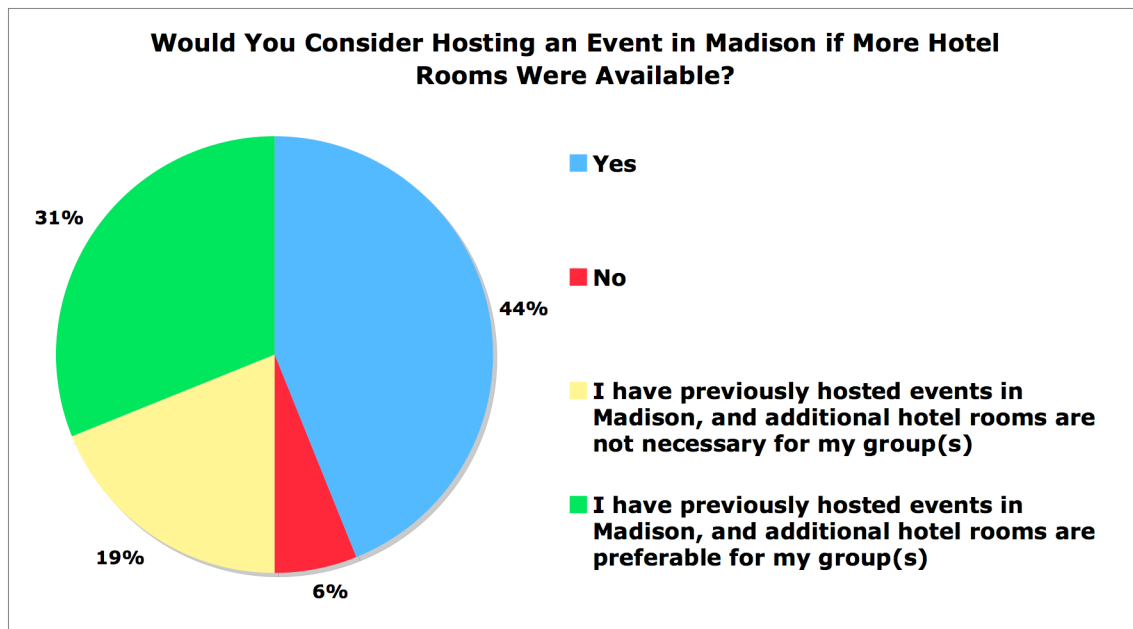
for peak nights. Because hotels rely on transient business for a considerable number of room nights, they cannot block all of their rooms for groups. As such, a block of 500 would suggest a minimum of 800 rooms available within the primary room block.

- Blocks of rooms that are set aside for attendees to reserve are important to event planners so that most of the group is able to stay in the same general vicinity, if not at the same property. The majority (36 percent) of respondents indicated that room blocks available should be between 301 and 350 rooms. Although it is ideal to have most attendees stay at the same property, these rooms can be spread among a small number of hotels in very close proximity. However, 56 percent of respondents said that it was either essential or very important that all rooms be blocked at one headquarters hotel. This would expose Madison's weakness and suggest the cure.
- The participants of the survey indicated that the highest room rates their attendees have paid range from \$100 to \$200 per night. More than half (54 percent) indicated paying a maximum of \$100 to \$150, and 42 percent paid between \$151 and \$200 for their nightly accommodations. Only four percent responded by saying they had experienced rates higher than \$200. This suggests that rate is not as much of a barrier for group business as is commonly thought, partially due to the "high rated" business nature of the groups.

Finally, participants were asked if they would consider hosting a meeting in Madison if more hotel rooms were available, if they have not come to Madison previously. Their responses are shown below.



**Figure 6-6**



Forty-four percent of the event planner participants who had not previously planned an event in Madison stated that they would consider hosting an event in Madison if a larger hotel block was available. For those who had come to Madison in the past, 31 percent stated that more hotel rooms would be preferred, while 19 percent stated that additional rooms were not necessary for their groups. Only six percent of the survey participants stated that they would not consider Madison as a meeting destination regardless of the number of hotel rooms available, which could be attributed to the specifics of travel logistics or meeting space requirements.

## Conclusion

Very few respondents to this survey were adamantly opposed to considering Madison as a meeting option. Most respondents consider Monona Terrace Convention Center is a desirable facility to host meetings; however, the supply of quality hotel rooms near Monona Terrace is the clear disadvantage. The room block requirements and rate sensitivity indicate that potential demand exists for events in Madison. The current supply of hotel rooms is not able to provide a solid room block large enough to accommodate the needs of many of the meeting planners who would otherwise consider Madison. A room block of 800 rooms is preferred by a majority, as well as a headquarters hotel that can block 350 of its own rooms.