



THE MEETINGS COACH»

PLACE-BASED EDUCATION

Unlocking lessons from our local communities.

BY AARON D. WOLOWIEC, MSA, CAE, CMP, CTA

Q: Our attendees are interested in getting out of the classroom to explore the local community. What learning opportunities exist for these adventure-seekers?

A: The number of continuing education units required by attendees to maintain their professional designations often determines the number of breakout sessions offered at annual meetings. But as more emphasis is placed on the total conference experience, attendees are increasingly interested in getting out of the classroom and into the community.

And why not? There's a lot to see and do in the conference destinations we select.

Place-based education seeks to help attendees learn by exploring community problems and solutions, and then bridging those insights with current workplace challenges. Place-based education differs from conventional classroom-based education in that it recognizes the local community as a primary resource for learning (which is often hands-on and project-based). It involves leveraging our conference environments to identify relevant local issues as topics worthy of our attention and energy—focusing more on problems or questions than on traditional academic experiences.

Take Detroit, for example. ASAE held its 2015 annual meeting in Detroit this August. It's no secret that Detroit has a rich history of both successes and setbacks. But the city's perseverance—as evidenced

by its vibrant business community—tells a remarkable story.

At the ASAE annual meeting, attendees were scheduled to visit The Parade Co., which produces one of the largest, oldest and most spectacular parades in the country. America's Thanksgiving Parade attracts nearly one million spectators annually.

The Parade Co.'s success is due, in part, to the more than 1,500 parade volunteers who donate more than 25,000 hours to the cause. The goal for ASAE attendees was to discover how the organization recruits, retains, trains and recognizes its volunteers.

Research strongly suggests that place-based education positively affects learning and is a legitimate source of professional regeneration for subject matter experts, speakers and practitioners alike.

Place-based education is changing the landscape of conferences, which have traditionally been held in a hotel or conference center. This learning revolution is inspiring new partnerships among conference organizers, attendees and the communities in which these events are held, and is illuminating the best and brightest cultural, environmental, economic and governmental innovations within our communities.



Aaron Wolowiec is founder and president of Event Garde, a Grand Rapids-based professional development consulting firm. Event Garde works with association leaders who want to deliver dynamic, meaningful and compelling education and networking experiences.

EVENT GARDE
 eventgarde.com
 616.710.1891



HAVE A MEETINGS DILEMMA YOU NEED HELP SOLVING?

Email your questions to Coach Aaron at aaron@eventgarde.com; please write "Meetings Mag" in the subject line.