

Join us in person at the 2023 Standards Working Group Meetings

EOS/ESD Association, Inc. recently announced that the March, June, and September standards working group meetings are face-to-face only in 2023. This strategic decision was made after considering variables influencing a decision to host face-to-face-only meetings. These variables include contract obligations, productivity, and effective meeting mechanics.

EOS/ESD Association, Inc. secures hotel contracts at least two years in advance to ensure the availability of meeting spacing in our preferred locations. Securing a contract this early has advantages such as more availability for our preferred dates and locking in lower room night and meal costs. The disadvantage is that we have to guarantee a minimum number of room nights that our attendees will book. We are contracted to pay a significant penalty if we do not meet the minimum number. During the contract negotiation period, we work with the hotel to keep this number as low as possible. However, there is a limit to how low the contracted minimum number can be for the amount of meeting space we use. Historically, hotels were willing to work with us to lower this metric if our attendance did not meet expectations and any resulting penalty was waived. Unfortunately, with the financial impact on the service industry over the last three years during the pandemic, hotels are no longer as willing to negotiate and waive penalties.

Another key aspect of the decision is productivity. EOS/ESD Association, Inc. hosted three annual face-to-face-only meetings for decades. All audio-visual and meal costs associated with face-to-face meetings are absorbed by the Association since there is no registration cost for attendees to participate. In 2016, the Association faced a budget shortage, so a decision was made to eliminate one face-to-face meeting. With more advanced technology available, virtual meetings were considered an option to maintain productivity, so two virtual-only meetings were added. On the surface, the virtual meetings appeared successful, with many new guests joining the meetings to see what our working groups were all about; we were excited at the thought of so many new potential volunteers becoming involved. Another perceived benefit was that working groups did not go six months without a meeting, so documents continued to move forward. Many guests attended for informational purposes, and working group chairs spent time in the meetings explaining the committee's history and documents or answering questions instead of working on documents in development. The volunteer and staff resources required to manage and host the meetings were unsustainable.

Effective meeting mechanics is also an important aspect of the decision. After being forced to host virtual-only meetings in 2020 due to the pandemic, companies started opening travel again in 2021. To capitalize on the advantages of face-to-face interaction and still support those unable to travel, we bridged the gap with hybrid meetings. The Association invested in cameras and internet infrastructure to ensure stable connections to give everyone, on-site and virtually, the same meeting experience. This experience equality is feasible to a certain on-site capacity because it works with a specific room set-up, which, unfortunately, has a seating limitation. Once the on-site capacity threshold is exceeded, our ability to provide an acceptable virtual experience is no longer viable. There is also a significant impact on productivity due to the inevitable audio and connection issues requiring time spent in meetings troubleshooting and speakers repeating themselves.

We appreciate your understanding and trust that EOS/ESD Association, Inc. has carefully considered the many impacts of hosting in-person-only meetings in 2023. There is no question that face-to-face meetings are the most productive regarding meeting facilitation, work output,

consensus building, and networking. However, as we review strategies, we continue to evaluate meeting participation and the other meeting metrics mentioned above. We appreciate all our volunteers who, like you, support EOS/ESD Association standards and other committees. We rely on volunteer participation and appreciate the wide variety of meeting participants that will attend in March and hope those that could not attend can join us next time.

Thank you for supporting us in setting the Global Standards for EOS/ESD!