

The great **venue** dilemma

The key 5 options on how to venue source

Author: Caroline Mackenzie



The great venue dilemma

The key 5 options on how to venue source

Many Often before the dust has settled and the last delegate has left, association executives are thinking about where to host their next congress or annual meeting. This is often a complicated and lengthy process.

The key is to be specific and always compare. To get a good deal you need to have a clear picture of what you want and what you need. The first step should be to invest some time and effort into creating your RFP. This is your briefing document which outlines your event and allows you to have easy comparison between destinations and venues giving you the best deal.

The specification document may contain information such as venue space requirements, draft programme format, social event plans, hotel accommodation requirements, requirements for ground arrangements, transport and travel access.

Depending on the selection process you adopt, and therefore the third parties who will receive this, you may also want to request information on what sort of financial or “in kind” local support may be available. It is important to be clear on expectations so that it is clear and up front to all parties from the outset.

You will also need to look at your organisation and recognise what your restrictions could be. This could be the level of resources within the organisation to actively coordinate this process, your association’s constitution or even the people who make the final selection decisions. By noting these down you can then evaluate which method is best for you and your organisation. There are a number of commonly used methods that may be used either independently or as a combination.

So what are the options?

1. Through Your Membership

One of the most common methods used by associations to source venues is to tap into their membership base. It doesn’t matter if your organisation is comprised of individual members or federations, each person can be motivated to find your next venue. By taking this proactive approach you can engage and encourage your members to participate and feel part of the process.

By bringing your event to a particular place, you can also help create awareness in the local professional community. This type of approach can help create a long term legacy boosting the profile of your association as local input can be invaluable.

This method can also be used if you have limited central resources. By using a chapter or local members, you can get a helping hand with the both the logistical management and / or financial risk. However, remember that this can be a significant level of responsibility and commitment and members will have different resources and experiences of handling events so it is best to take this into consideration.

2. Destination Expression of Interest

Another method is to approach venues and destinations directly. This can be quite an administrative task and often takes a lot of searching and calling to find the right place. The most efficient way to do this is to create a request for proposal (RFP). This is a document which outlines all your requirements in terms of meeting space, hotel accommodation and social activities. This can then be submitted either directly to convention bureaus or to industry associations such as International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA).

One of the advantages of using trade association such as ICCA is that it enables you to distribute your request to a wide international market very quickly and effectively. Expect a very high number of submissions but remember it can also become hard to sort through them all. The key for success is to be specific. Set a deadline, be clear about what you need and perhaps also ensure that submission involve all the relevant parties such as the convention bureau, venues and professional conference organisers.

3. Informal Expression of Interest

This is probably the simplest method of determining your venue. Many members and agencies proactively approach associations to bring their next event to a particular city or venue. By using this method you can simply choose from one of the options that have been presented to you.

There is nothing wrong with this method; quite the contrary a proactive approach from a third party can show a keenness and eagerness to host your event. However, you still need to qualify the approach to ensure that they are able to meet all the requirements. The main disadvantage of using this method is that you are unable to compare between a number of options. This may mean that it is hard to ensure that you are getting a competitive offer.

4. Geographical Rotation

Many associations have an international membership and by having the congress use a pattern of rotation, the event will be accessible to all your members on a regular basis. There are different ways you can determine regions; this can be as simplistic as countries and continents or it may follow a specific pattern you have for grouping your membership. By using this method, you can narrow your choices and combine this with suggestions from your membership to help decide your subsequent congresses locations.

5. Using a PCO / AMC

Some associations outsource this function to professional conference organisers (PCO) or Association Management Companies (AMC) who can do all the “leg work” in selecting your next congress destination. This is an option especially if you have limited internal resources available.

The benefit of using an international agency is the first hand experience of delivering events in various countries and cities. They can provide valuable insight into what will work and what won't which may affect your final choice. Many agencies will also have extensive networks of venues which mean they are able to actively negotiate a competitive offer. Even if you do not have a core PCO or AMC engaged on a long term basis, other companies are often willing to provide these services either free of charge or as a one off consultancy service.

The next step

There are definite ways to be more efficient in your venue sourcing. By using the resources and networks available to you, you can actually find yourself saving both time and money. Obtaining the proposals, offers or submissions is just the first step in the selection process. It is important to always double check that your choice will actually meet all your event needs and requirements.

You should always feel confident in your shortlist and, most important, your ultimate choice should be one which will encourage your members to attend!

Authors

Caroline Mackenzie

Regional Director Business Development, UK & Benelux



Caroline Mackenzie has over 19 years of experience in the meetings and events industry, beginning her career in hotel management with a boutique country house chain in the UK. Since then she has worked within various sectors of the meeting and events industry including international meeting and event management within the medical communications sector providing meeting and event management support to major pharmaceutical and healthcare clients. She has also spent a significant time working within the Professional Conference Organiser agency environment providing logistics management support to predominantly national and international Associations in the UK and internationally. She has managed a vast range of meetings worldwide, across a variety of topics and professions, ranging from 10 – 8,000 delegates. Caroline has worked for Concorde Services for 7 years and is currently the Regional Director Business Development, UK & Benelux.

About Congrex

Congrex provide a tailored offering for our clients' needs when organising meetings, events and conferences, and also deliver association management and travel & accommodations services. Established in 1982, we serve a variety of industries from our many offices, utilising our network of partners globally. Our extensive client base includes national and international associations, governmental organisations and corporations.

Clients' success is what drives Congrex. We believe the best part of our work is the close relationship we establish with our clients, which allows us to address their challenges and deliver exciting projects.

Let's meet, visit www.congrex.com

Disclaimer

The information contained in this document represents the current view of Congrex on the issues discussed as of the date of publication. Because Congrex must respond to changing market conditions, it should not be interpreted to be a commitment on the part of Congrex, and cannot guarantee the accuracy of any information presented after the date of publication.