



How Can **Knowledge Exchange** Benefit Your Association?



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Knowledge exchange, or knowledge share, is a term that we hear within private and public industry clusters and from so many stakeholders today. The consensus seems to be that if properly executed, it can have profound beneficial outcomes, both tangible and intangible. Yet, intellectual property, privacy concerns, brand loyalty, customer and membership acquisition, all seem to fight against this altruistic concept that many associations and NGOs practise, which is to share knowledge for the greater good.

Most Not-for-Profits (NFPs) share a similar challenge: trying to solve big issues with meagre resources. So, how can knowledge exchange benefit such organisations when it comes to their events, meetings and congresses?

Cities and knowledge exchange

Events and congresses play a key role in generating revenue and bolstering the resources for many of the aforementioned organisations, while providing much needed revenue to service

their respective membership activities. Navigating through a strategy of sharing knowledge, in order to generate successful outcomes from an event or congress, is essential for many, but will be a challenge for all parties involved.

A key success factor in staging an event or congress of any size is the intelligent and strategic selection of a host location and city. It is of vital importance to that NFP's overall objective, as it can directly influence attendance and participation from attendees, sponsors and exhibitors, to name a few. Associations must

therefore be selective in the regions and cities where they decide to host such events.

Cities are aware of this and, as such, knowledge exchange between them when bidding for an event or congress can be of immense value to both the NFP and the city, as well as its stakeholders. Sharing of event or congress data regarding size, number of delegates, duration and economic impact value is nothing new. Cities and Convention Visitor Bureaux (CVBs) around the world have been exchanging such data for years, either direct with one

another or through their membership of organisations such as the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) or the Union of International Associations (UIA) and their respective database platforms. The type of data therein is important as it helps to qualify the potential size of a specific event by providing relevant statistics.

However, the most vital piece of knowledge exchange between two or more CVBs is the non-data, or intangible “soft” information. We are beginning to experience much deeper knowledge exchange between a current or previous host CVB and a future bidding CVB on the bidding processes, political structure of a relevant NFP, decision-making process, budget considerations and expectations of host city support. This type of knowledge exchange from one entity to the other can provide competitive advantage when there are numerous CVBs bidding for the same event. It can only happen when the CVB sharing the intelligence is open and willing to share with the bidding CVB with whom they have a mutual relationship.

NFPs must share intelligence

At the delivery end of the event or congress, NFPs often have limited human resources and expertise to deliver events. As a consequence, they must rely on third party outsourced professionals, such as event agencies or Professional Congress Organisers (PCOs), to do so on their behalf. Working together successfully, sometimes for several years, relies on a shared understanding of both parties’ objectives together with an open and transparent sharing of relevant information, knowledge and technologies.

Therefore, in order to ensure that a succinct and collaborative event strategy is created and agreed well in advance, it is essential that NFPs share and exchange a certain amount of intelligence (membership information, corporate partnership agreements, potential funding and grant

programmes with their selected PCO). The PCO and the NFP should be seen as partners in the delivery of that event and must agree on a modus operandi of exchanging such knowledge while protecting privacy and intellectual property.

Interestingly, knowledge-share, when one considers its relation to collaboration within numerous PCOs, can be a powerful strategy when implemented effectively and when the relevant parties have clear roles and responsibilities. Recently, The International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) conducted interviews with numerous PCOs to deliver the FIGO XXIII World Congress in Sydney in 2021. Two IAPCO PCOs, International Conference Services and The Conference Company, took a strategic decision to come together in order to share their knowledge of congress management and experience of delivering similar congresses all over the world. The result is they won the contract to deliver FIGO in Sydney in 2021.

Sharing for the greater good

Finally, and perhaps the most important consideration: in order to appreciate the importance of knowledge exchange for the NFP, one has only to look at the event or congress itself. As a key activity within the NFP’s membership engagement programme, the event or

congress is designed to recognise, promote and facilitate opportunities for knowledge exchange. Examples abound that demonstrate positive outcomes following the chance (or planned) meeting between two academics, scientists or researchers (as examples) at such an event. A platform, providing each of them the opportunity to share initial research findings and to then agree to collaborate on further exchanges has, in many cases resulted in the development of life-saving vaccines, rehabilitation technologies and other transformative outcomes.

In regards to recent political shifts towards a more nationalistic focus within some regions of the world, which might threaten the opportunities for such international knowledge exchange, NFPs must continue to push for open opportunities for knowledge exchange between their members, partners, host cities and service providers, in order to ensure that the relevant knowledge between parties can continue to develop and result in further developments for the greater good.

Quite simply, a combination of a unified voice, a clear mission and a mutually beneficial environment of collaboration and knowledge exchange must be at the epicentre of any group if it is to grow and succeed.



This article was provided by the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers, which today represents 133 companies from 40 countries, comprised of over 9100 event professionals, who organise international and national congresses globally.

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