

Accountability Issues in Healthcare Congress Management

Endorsed by

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Introduction

There are many issues relating to the successful management of healthcare congresses, which fall under the general area of best practices and accountability. This document sets out some of those issues and provides advice and recommendations as to their implementation.

The document is divided into a number of broad sections:

- Accuracy of information
- Contractual obligations
- Financial arrangements
- Data protection and intellectual property
- Safety and security issues
- Other issues

DEFINITIONS

Medical Society	The host of the Congress whose responsibility it is to produce the Event
PCO	The Professional Congress Organizer appointed by the Medical Society for consultation to, and for the organization and management of, the Event
Event	Medical or Healthcare Congress or Event, hosted by the Medical Society, organized either by the Medical Society or the PCO, supported by the Corporate Sponsors
Corporate Sponsor	The Corporate or Healthcare Company which is supporting the event by way of sponsorship or exhibition
Delegate	Those persons registering for an Event attending the scientific sessions and associated programmes

Section A

Accuracy of information

ACCURATE BID INFORMATION (Guidelines and Manual)

Events are reliant upon accurate information being provided at all times, from the outset at Bid Stage through to the Closing Report.

In order that an accurate Bid can be made by a country/city or indeed a precise proposal submitted by a PCO for the organization of the healthcare congress, it is essential that the specification is realistic and a written briefing for all stakeholders provided.

Guidelines

It is important that the Guidelines for Submitting a Bid are clear and concise and that the appropriate rules and regulations within which the Bid must be made are adhered to at all times.

Manual

When a Medical Society, together with the PCO, Convention Bureau, City and if appropriate any other parties, are submitting a Bid, the information contained therein should be accurate for the hosting of the event, especially with regard to:

- Congress facilities
- Hotel bedrooms
- Budget
- Transport and International Access

It is preferable that the International Medical Society monitors and controls the initiation of the Bid.

Please refer to the IAPCO document: "Bidding for a Congress" for further information.

ACCURACY OF PROVIDED INFORMATION

At all times best practice demands that information contained in documents is accurate and not open to misinterpretation. If there is room for doubt, descriptions should be in exact detail so as to avoid any misunderstanding and should always be in writing.

Information is likely to be contained in, but not limited to:

- Bid Guidelines (briefing document)
- Bid Manual (offer)
- Congress Guidelines
- Promotional Material
- Industry Prospectus
- Industry Technical Manual
- Programme Information
- Website
- On-site Schedules
- Closing Reports

ACCURACY OF INFORMATION ON GOVERNMENTAL, FISCAL, REGULATORY RULES

The PCO engaged by the Medical Society will act as an intermediary between the Medical Society and the various professional advisers required to provide accurate and legal information, in order to meet the different governmental, fiscal and legal regulations within any given country. The PCO is not engaged to replace the services of a professional in these matters but to ensure that the Medical Society receives the appropriate advice. It is the Corporate Sponsor's responsibility to obtain the information regarding those matters that they require for their participation in the healthcare congress. Some Medical Societies have their own in-house PCOs or are using Core PCOs with specific role definitions which should be addressed.

ACCURACY OF ATTENDANCE FIGURES

It is important that attendance figures, both historical and foreseen, are as accurate as possible. The inflation of figures to boost any one particular event leads to mis-information with potential unmet expectations. Accuracy is important to:

- Assess trends in attendance which might affect venue selection
- Accuracy of attendance in order that PCOs and suppliers can accurately estimate their costs
- Accuracy of attendance for the Corporate Sponsor to assess its participation
- Accuracy of attendance to ensure realistic budgeting for the Medical Society

Attendance should be clearly defined so that it is always clear what is meant:

- Delegates (paying) – registering and attending scientific sessions
- Delegates (non-paying) – invited participants
- Media
- Accompanying Persons (registered) – spouses or partners accompanying a delegate
- Industry Attendees – including exhibition stand personnel

KNOWLEDGE OF COMPETING EVENTS

Competing Events relate both to healthcare congresses of similar scientific/therapeutic area and also to both location and size.

Various parties have a responsibility to have knowledge of competing events:

- Medical Society – knowledge of events that are scientifically in competition with their own
- PCO – knowledge of what events are taking place, when and where
- Corporate Sponsor – knowledge of the events with which they will be involved and which thus may dilute their participation elsewhere

It is in everyone's best interest that knowledge of competing events is communicated to the other parties as soon as possible. Early sharing of this information can allow for:

- Collaboration between two competing events to create one joint congress, delivering more delegates to the combined event and providing substantial time and cost savings
- Change of congress dates and/or of venue
- And if no change is possible, at least knowledge of the potential financial impact

Section B

Contractual obligations

DEFINITION OF THE LEGAL ENTITY

It is important that all parties know who is the legal entity with responsibility for the healthcare congress. It might be, but not limited to, a:

- National Association
- International Association
- Consortium of individual professors
- Limited Company
- Special Foundation
- PCO
- Corporate Sponsor
- Any incorporated entity

The importance is to know with whom contracts are to be made.

APPROPRIATE CONTRACTING OF THE HEALTHCARE CONGRESS

There are many contracts involved between the parties organizing a healthcare congress, for example:

- Medical Society and the PCO
- Medical Society or PCO and the Venue/Conference Centre
- PCO and the Suppliers and Contractors
- Medical Society or PCO and the Corporate Sponsor
- PCO and the Exhibitor

A contract should be balanced and fair to both parties, reflecting the relevant aims and objectives. It must be realistic and precisely described in a format that is easily understood by both parties. The content must be detailed and should contain the mechanisms to handle non-performance by either party, with rules as to how to proceed from thereon. It is important that the signatories on the contracts are those authorised to do so. Qualified legal counsels should review all contracts. At all times best practice demands that information contained in documents is accurate and not open to misinterpretation. If there is room for doubt, descriptions should be in exact detail so as to avoid any misunderstanding and should always be in writing.

SELECTION OF QUALIFIED SERVICE PROVIDERS

A qualified service provider is a company competent to provide the services for which they have been retained.

It should be accepted that all parties involved in the delivery of the healthcare congress wish to ensure the success of the Event, however, it is the contractual responsibility of those engaging third parties to ensure that they meet the appropriate standards.

The PCO is the core organization engaged to secure third party suppliers and will have knowledge of a sound network of appropriate service providers.

Qualifications such as ISO standards should be taken into account along with recommendations from other users. In all cases, references should be sought when utilizing a new supplier.

ADDRESSING UNDERPERFORMANCE

Performance is an essential ingredient in the provision of all supply services and should be contractually defined.

It is recognised that there is a possibility of underperformance in the organization of any event. It is important to note this fact and to be prepared to address this issue should the need arise. Addressing the issue of underperformance should be a consideration in all contracts. It should not however be a route to the non-payment of invoices, but should seek as to how to solve the problem with the minimum of disruption and inconvenience to all parties in order to reach a successful conclusion. If underperformance has to be addressed, an unbiased opinion should be sought.

In the case of proven, insufficient underperformance, or non-delivery, it must be recognised that this could proceed into litigation. Therefore all contract partners involved should do their utmost to perform and deliver to the internationally acceptable standard.

Post-event data should accurately reflect the performance.

Section C

Financial obligations

AUDITING OF ACCOUNTS

It is good business practice, as with any financial venture, that congress accounts are audited by an independent auditor.

The PCO takes on the responsibility for the financial management of a healthcare congress and at all times works in close consultation with the Medical Society by whom they have been engaged:

- Preparation of budget
- Preparation of cashflow
- Interim financial reports
- Regular comparison of expenditure to budget
- Management of funds and local taxes
- Draft profit and loss accounts, together with balance sheet within six months of the end of the Event
- Final accounts and financial report to be provided to the Medical Society for independent audit within one year of the end of the Event

Where Corporate Sponsors are heavily involved in the healthcare congress, this should be recognised and a co-operative approach to financial transparency implemented.

CONTINUING TO TRADE WHILST KNOWINGLY INSOLVENT

Insolvency means trading with insufficient funds to meet the contractual obligations.

Any organization has a financial/fiscal and contractual responsibility to its suppliers and its clients and it is therefore illegal to continue trading whilst knowingly insolvent. This applies not only to suppliers, Corporate Sponsors and PCOs, but also to Medical Societies who may continue to administer their healthcare congress in the knowledge that revenue is less than anticipated and needed, and that consequently they will be unable to meet their financial commitments.

SECURITY OF CREDIT CARDS

Fraudulent use of credit cards is an ever-increasing occurrence.

Best practice is required to ensure that all means are taken to protect the integrity and security of the credit card numbers within your care. Secure on-line systems are essential and authority required from the delegate to confirm that their credit card details can be passed to a third party such as guaranteeing a hotel booking.

A budget contingency should be allowed for, for a period of six months, in the event of credit card chargebacks after the Event.

Section D

Data protection, intellectual property and insider trading

DATA PROTECTION

The individual has the right to protection of privacy from the circulation of his/her own personal details without prior understanding or approval.

Whilst the actual regulation varies from country to country, and is of particular relevance in Europe, it is best practice that every step is taken to protect this information when:

- Obtaining list of potential delegates for promotion
- Passing on the list of delegates to third parties
- Printing the names/addresses of the delegates in a List of Participants

The rule states that in all cases the rights of the individual stipulates that they have the offer to opt in or opt out of having their information passed on.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY/COPYRIGHT

Intellectual Property is the ownership of specific work and who has the right to the use of that work. Unless otherwise agreed upon between the parties, the copyright regularly belongs to the author of a document/file.

There are various elements of Intellectual Property which occur in the organization of healthcare congresses. It is important to establish whose intellectual property it is and, if you wish to change that ownership, to whom you should seek permission.

- Scientific Content
 - Faculty Presentations
 - Abstracts and Free Communications
 - Posters
- Satellite Symposia
- Exhibition
 - Design
 - Content
 - Especially commissioned products
- Overall Event
 - Scientific content,
 - Design
- Promotion
 - Photography
 - Design
 - Print
 - Webcasting

Submission of abstracts, or other input in writing, shall always be accompanied by a declaration/ approval of the author that the said materials can be reproduced in the Book of Abstracts or other publishing media (if any).

INSIDER TRADING LAWS

As long as any data has not already been released to the public the submission (and publication) of data, including abstracts, which could potentially affect the price of a company's stock, is subject to EC Directive 2003/6/EC and a similar ruling by the Security Exchange Commission in the US ("Selective Disclosure and Insider Trading", release 33-7881). These two rulings collectively known as "Insider Trading Laws" exist to ensure that price sensitive data, which could influence the stock price of a publicly listed company, is not released in a selective way, and to punish any subsequent insider trading of such stocks. These laws affect all people dealing with new scientific data which is not yet in the public domain and apply to healthcare companies, congress scientific committees, PCOs and their various sub-contractors and, importantly, to individuals such as presenters and speakers at healthcare congresses.

If data (e.g. the results of a clinical trial) is not yet in the public domain and is potentially price sensitive, then all concerned parties including individuals must negotiate strictly binding Confidentiality Agreements, before releasing such data e.g. in an abstract. Any such Confidentiality Agreement must provide not only for the confidentiality of the data but also to strictly forbid its spread, prior to its official release to the public.

TENDER CONFIDENTIALITY

Information provided by different PCOs when tendering for the organization of an Event hosted by the Medical Society should be treated as the property of the PCO. New or innovative ideas, proposals and concepts should not be adopted by the Medical Society unless that PCO is engaged to organize the Event.

Section E

Safety and security issues

APPROPRIATE INSURANCE OF AVENUE & HEALTHCARE CONGRESS

Whilst most Congress Centres have their own insurance, the extent of that cover in relation to the occupier varies considerably from country to country and should be checked.

It is important that the Medical Society and/or its PCO should seek advice on the level of insurance from a professional broker with the aim of supplementing the existing insurance to a suitable level.

The Medical Society, or the PCO on behalf of the Medical Society, should take out sufficient insurance to cover the healthcare congress itself – *Please refer to the HCA publication 'Safety and Security at Healthcare Congresses' for further information on event insurance.*

The Corporate Sponsors may wish to see both the Congress Centre and the Congress insurance policy to meet their potential liability issues and for them to take out additional cover.

PROFESSIONAL INDEMNITY

Professional Indemnity insurance protects both the individual and the company against unfair prosecution and for Errors & Omissions. It is best practice for all parties involved to carry professional indemnity insurance, the level of protection being relative to the size of any potential risk.

APPROPRIATE RISK ASSESSMENT

The word risk is broadly defined as the possibility of suffering harm or loss. Risk Management or Risk Assessment means identifying possible risks and more importantly analysing the potential of each risk so that the more significant risks can be managed on an on-going basis. *Please refer to the HCA publication 'Safety and Security at Healthcare Congress' for further information on Risk Assessment and Management.*

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Health and Safety is a continuum of Risk Management and Risk Assessment. It is important that all parties undertake their element of Health and Safety:

- Medical Society – the host of the Event whose responsibility it is to produce the Event
- PCO – the Professional Congress Organizer appointed by the Medical Society for consultation to, and for the organization and management of, the Event
- Corporate Sponsor – the Corporate or Healthcare Company which is supporting the event by way of sponsorship or exhibition
- Sponsor Event Team – the in-house organizing department of the Corporate Sponsor whose responsibility it is to organize the participation of the Corporate Sponsor
- Suppliers and Contractors – the companies engaged by either the Medical Society, the PCO or the Corporate Sponsor to provide goods, services and supplies for the mounting of the Event
- Venue – the Conference Centre or Hotel in which the Event will take place
- Delegate – those persons registering for the Event, attending the scientific sessions and associated programmes
- Participants – those persons including Delegates, Exhibitors, Accompanying Persons and all other personnel who are attending the Event
- Exhibitor and Sponsored Symposia – those persons involved in the exhibition either as Stand Personnel or Suppliers

Each and everyone of those participating in a healthcare congress has a duty of safety to all others, and every effort should be made to ensure that safety rules are adhered to at all times.

All parties indicated in Health and Safety above should ensure that they have suitable insurance cover for themselves and for their responsibilities.

Section F Other issues

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

A best practice approach should be taken with regard to environmental policies on individual healthcare congresses. Consideration should be given to selecting venues with a positive environmental strategy. Furthermore, it should be an essential part of the organisation of a healthcare congress to discuss environmental policies with the venue. *Please refer to the Convention Industry Council publication 'Green Meetings Report' www.conventionindustry.org/projects/green_mtgs.htm*

LABOUR REGULATIONS

Labour regulations apply both to the use of union and non-union labour and also to the national working conditions/regulations to be applied to any employed or contracted personnel.

It is important that any labour regulations are adhered to. Professional advice should be sought when working in any country with whose labour laws you are not familiar. The effects of such labour laws should be incorporated into any budgets and included in all information provided to the Corporate Sponsors by way of the Industry Technical Manual.

VISA FRAUD

Visa Fraud is the abuse and manipulation of a national immigration system for the purpose of gaining illegal entry into a country.

Invitations to healthcare congresses are just one means of achieving this end. This is often realised by means of miss-use of letters of invitation, which should be carefully monitored. Caution should be used when placing such letters on the website for non-restricted downloading. Letters of invitation should be sent only to support a visa application once registration and payment has been cleared.

Glossary terms

There are a number of 'glossary of terms' and 'terminology dictionaries' which might assist readers in the various terms included in this document:

Convention Industry Council – www.conventionindustry.org

IAPCO Meetings Industry Terminology Dictionary – www.iapco.org
800 words in 12 languages

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