



International Collaboration of PeriAnaesthesia Nurses ICPAN

Promoting Global Excellence in PeriAnaesthesia Nursing

Guidelines for choosing a Professional Conference Organiser

Professional Conference Organizers [PCO's] can be utilised to assist the National PeriAnaesthesia Associations host the biennial ICPAN conference. PCO's provide expertise in planning and executing the administration essential to ensure a successful global conference.

The ICPAN Board advises any National Association making a conference bid to research three prospective PCO companies and choose the company which would appear most fit for the purpose. Obviously PCO's with a proven record in organising medical conferences may be the most appealing. The selected PCO will work with the National Association prospective conference leader to complete the Conference Bid Document and prepare a brochure setting out the attractions of the prospective host city/country. The ICPAN Board of Directors will ultimately choose the National Association which scores highest on the Conference Bid Document supported by the Conference Bid Brochure.

This document outlines some useful points for you to consider, as prospective conference leader in choosing the most effective PCO for the job.

Steps towards choosing the PCO :

A. Tender Document

The National PeriAnaesthetic Association prepares a tender document giving details of the proposed conference to prospective PCO's [three]. The information will be used by the PCO to prepare their prospective bid. At a minimum the prospective PCO's need to know:

- The number of days of the conference
- How frequently the event is held
- Approximate number of delegates
- Registration fee at previous conferences if known
- Accommodation requirements
- Size of exhibition
- Price of commercial stand - per metre squared [m2]
- Number of proposed abstracts/papers to be received
- Number of proposed abstracts/papers to be accepted, either as posters or oral presentations
- Number of parallel sessions
- Number of social events
- Description of pre- and post conference events, if any.

B. PCO prepares Conference Bid Proposal

This tender document can be sent to selected PCO's to allow them some time to evaluate the Association's needs and formulate a conference plan and a draft budget. In addition the ICPAN Conference Bid Document and Advice to Bidders Document should be sent to prospective PCO's to give further advice on how to frame the bid to fit the needs of a global nursing conference.

C. PCO Fee Structure.

The PCO offering the best bid proposal at the lowest cost would be the ideal choice. If fees have been quoted uniformly by all prospective PCO's, then it is easy to decide which company is most cost effective. However, it is important to know exactly what is being offered for this price. The prospective conference leader and the National Association may decide that it's members will carry out some of the tasks themselves and that not all of the services of the PCO are needed. This may lower the overall cost if the budget is tight. The PCO services normally offered are:

- General conference management (relating to specific services required)
- Sponsorship
- Exhibition sales and management

- Scientific programme management
- Registration
- Social events
- Accommodation

D. PCO presentations

The National Tourist Board may assist the prospective conference leader and the National Association to organize presentations from three different PCO's. 10-20 minutes should be allowed for each one. At the end of these presentations, there will be time for questions. A set of questions should be prepared and each PCO representative asked in turn to supply details of their bid. Taking notes on what they are offering is useful but many give an electronic copy of their presentation. Request written references or details of contacts from whom you can request a verbal reference. References should be sought from previous clients and it may be useful to contact a supplier such as a hotel or conference venue.

Questions that may be asked:

1. Does the company have a proven track record in organizing your type of event?
2. Does the company have a proven track record in organizing events of a similar size and in similar venues?
3. Is the company financially sound and do they have a sensible amount of future business to suggest they will continue to be so?
4. Is the company involved in any legal issues or financial disputes with past clients?
5. What is the company's core business? Many travel agents, tour companies, public relations consultants offer conference organizing services. A PCO, however, has no conflicting interests, the main activity of the company being that of conference organization resulting in greater experience and skills in this area.
6. Is the company sufficiently advanced technologically to handle the requirements of your event? Electronic communication and

submission of abstracts/papers and registration are an essential part of today's conference organization.

7. Is the company's staff sufficiently experienced to be able to handle your event? Ensure that the person assigned to organize your conference has many years' experience and that you feel comfortable discussing your requirements and working in partnership with them.
8. Who is responsible for the finances of the event and who controls the accounting? It is important to ensure that, unless there is an agreed financial arrangement, any conference income remains your property and that you have the right to make financial decisions. It would be prudent to ask if they offer a no-loss contract. This means that your association is assured not to make a financial loss. Many PCO's do not ask for any start-up funds but it is important to clarify the timeline for payment of any deposits.
9. What procedures are in place should unforeseen circumstances affect key conference staff involved in the event immediately prior to the conference (e.g. sickness, accident).
10. Does the company have a proven track record in raising sponsorship and selling exhibition space?
11. Does the company sub-contract any of the services that they claim to offer?
12. Does the company belong to any reputable professional associations such as the International Association of Professional Conference Organisers [IAPCO]? It is important to know that some associations allow membership in exchange for a subscription and do not uphold any form of professional standards.
13. Is the company quality assured?
14. What is the company's environmental policy?
15. What reporting relationships will be established and how are these documented?

E. Important points to consider before appointing a PCO:

- That you as prospective conference leader and your National Association have received written or oral references on the PCO company
- That the fees for their services are clear (e.g. Is tax included in the price or is it added to the total bill? What rate of tax is appropriate for each service?). Some PCO's charge per delegate, some charge per service depending on the needs of the client. It is important to study the figures carefully before committing to a particular PCO. Sometimes there is a little room for negotiation on the fees.
- Meeting the team assigned to your conference before you commit to a PCO may be helpful. The PCO representative who makes the presentation initially may not be the assigned lead for the conference so it is important to establish who that person is as soon as possible.
- Analyse your strengths and weaknesses as a prospective conference leader [and those on your National Association Conference Team]. Have a plan about who will take on individual roles in the team [financial, creative, scientific programme, commercial, website]. What help will each team member need from the PCO? Clarity on deciding exactly what services you need from the PCO and what areas you can manage internally will help bring down the cost and increase the efficiency of the project.

F. The Final Decision

Once you have thoroughly researched three PCO's and compared what they offer / price / personalities you will be ready to make a decision. If you have done the ground work thoroughly you will be much more likely to make a good choice.

Once you have selected the PCO you need to ensure that you have a clear written contract, which specifies the work you require to be undertaken by the PCO and the cost involved. This contract should be studied carefully and any ambiguous wording should be clarified prior to signing.

Good luck with the conference planning!