

# *Bidding for a Congress*

## **INTRODUCTION**

A “bid” is defined as an invitation to hold an international congress in your country. In most cases the national group or chapter of an international organisation will need to support the initiative and will be responsible for the management of the congress if the bid is successful. Having obtained such a commitment from the national organisation, formal invitations can be prepared and the bid project can begin.

Bids may be handled in a different way depending on the destination presenting the bid. There are cities with a Convention or Visitor Bureau, some active, some less so, and other cities without one at all, which has an influence on who is taking the lead and initiative on active congress promotion. It is however important that the PCO and the Convention Bureau (if existing), and for larger congresses the Congress/Convention Centre, work together in harmony unifying their efforts and strengths in order to achieve the common goal.

Bidding for an international congress to be held in your country requires commitment and effort by all parties involved in the process and warrants a dedicated course of action. The energy, hard work and costs related to it are very often underestimated and it is vital that the parties which make up the “bid team” take their responsibilities seriously in order to mount a successful bid submission.

If it takes so much energy, hard work and money, is it worthwhile undertaking such an initiative?

## **WHY BID FOR A CONGRESS?**

A Congress brings enormous benefits to the professional community, the city and the country. These benefits start years before the meeting is actually held, from the moment the professional congress organiser (PCO) informs the governmental institutions about the intention to bid to host the event. A chain reaction is created as everyone involved focuses on one goal – winning the bid for the city and the country.

The PCO plays a very important role, usually activating all the links in the chain. The PCO provides a case study to demonstrate the importance of the bid subject, how many delegates the congress will bring to the country, the type of benefits the congress will bring; what this represents in financial terms to the local economy; how many people will be involved in the process (possibly in newly created jobs) and last, but not least, the opportunity to show the world how wonderful the country and the city are!

Governmental institutions work alongside the local Convention Bureau and the PCO to secure the right to host the congress.

**The benefits for the professional community (the client) include:**

- networking with colleagues
- state of the art information
- business exchanges and co-operation
- business opportunities
- maximising attendance from members of the local profession due to the low cost of attendance compared to offshore congresses (especially in third world economies or other countries with low or no industry support).

**The benefits for the country include:**

- pre and post tours increasing local income
- an increase in tax revenues from commerce (shops, restaurants, hotels,...)
- opinion leaders talk about their time in the host country
- increase in the GDP for the country
- increase in the number of tourists visiting the country.

Interest is generated about the host country and city amongst delegates, often for the first time. They will be keen to learn about the geographic location, the climate, the attractions, the culture, the food and the people. Whilst delegates attend congresses with the aim of networking and increasing their knowledge and skills, they are also attracted by the appeal of the destination.

**The benefits for the city include:**

- generation of employment, by hiring temporary services
- increase in the GDP of the city
- increase in the municipality tax revenues from commerce
- word of mouth marketing – the delegates tell others about the favourable experience they had in the city and the country.

If the congress is particularly large and has to comply with specific guidelines set by the international organisation, it is likely that improvements will be made to the local congress industry infrastructure. The Olympic Games is that most likely known as the event with the highest impact on a city with regard to infrastructure and economy of the host city, however, in some cases a congress may have a similar effect by improving the city's infrastructure to enable it to accommodate such an important meeting.

**THE BID CRITERIA**

It is crucial to analyse the bid criteria and conduct in-depth research to ensure the right decisions are made and the appropriate actions are taken in order to meet the bid criteria.

Aspects to be taken into consideration are:

- ✓ Locations of past congresses, confirmed venues for future congresses and the frequency of the congresses
- ✓ Established rotation between continents or countries
- ✓ Next open year
- ✓ Existence of an official tender document (guideline for bid presentation)
- ✓ Specific congress requirements (meeting rooms, exhibition space, accommodation, social events,...) and how the congress has evolved and progressed over the past years
- ✓ Requested presence, involvement and support of the related national industry as well as Local Authorities
- ✓ Accessibility of the host country for those nationalities which commonly attend the congress and general infrastructure and logistics

- ✓ Ideal dates (preferred season/month) taking into consideration dates of similar congresses to be held in the same period
- ✓ Availability of congress facilities and hotels for the proposed dates
- ✓ Congress budget (is information available about the budgets of former congresses and what is the financial objective of the International Organisation?)
- ✓ Place and dates for the presentation of the bid
- ✓ Decision making process relating to future congress destinations, e.g. who has voting rights, what is the voting procedure, what is the scoring system, what aspects are more important than others.

Once all the data has been analysed, a decision needs to be made about the best destination for the bid and the optimum future open date. The next open date is not always the most appropriate one nor the best one to aim for; it may depend on continent/country rotation. There may be the possibility that not enough members with voting rights who support the bid will be at the meeting where the bid is going to be presented. Once it is clear that the country and city meet the bid criteria a bid team needs to be created.

## **THE BID TEAM OR ORGANISING COMMITTEE**

There are a number of members of a bid team and each one plays an important role in the bid's success. This group steers the bid direction and makes the fundamental decisions regarding the overall Congress "look". The members of the Organising Committee can consist of but are not limited to:

### **The person who initiated the Bid (often the chairperson)**

This person is an eminent member in the field for which the Congress is being held. Ideally the person has been involved in the international organisation and understands the politics of the group. Generally this person will become the Congress Chair/President if the bid is successful.

### **Invited members from the same field**

These people can be other eminent members of the field or the young "stars" who have the energy and commitment to assist the Chair in the bid process and the Congress.

### **Representative from the PCO company**

The PCO representative works closely with the Committee Chair and the other members of the committee to develop the bid. The PCO assists with the strategy for the bid, conducts a financial viability study of the Congress and prepares the budget for the bid document.

### **Representative from the Congress venue**

The representative from the Congress venue assists with knowledge about how the centre works and advises the committee of how to make the best use of the centre.

### **Representative from the Convention Bureau/National Tourism Organisation (if existing)**

This person advises the committee regarding the destination/product information, assists with the preparation of the letters of support from Government officials, prepares the presentation document, supplies gimmicks and promotional material to support the bid, undertakes competitive analysis of the competitors and provides local support with the International Organisations; *(if not existing this role is often undertaken by the PCO and Congress/Convention Centre).*

### Representative from the host country airline

The airline provides travel support for those undertaking the lobbying of the bid and making the final bid presentation.

### Sponsor companies

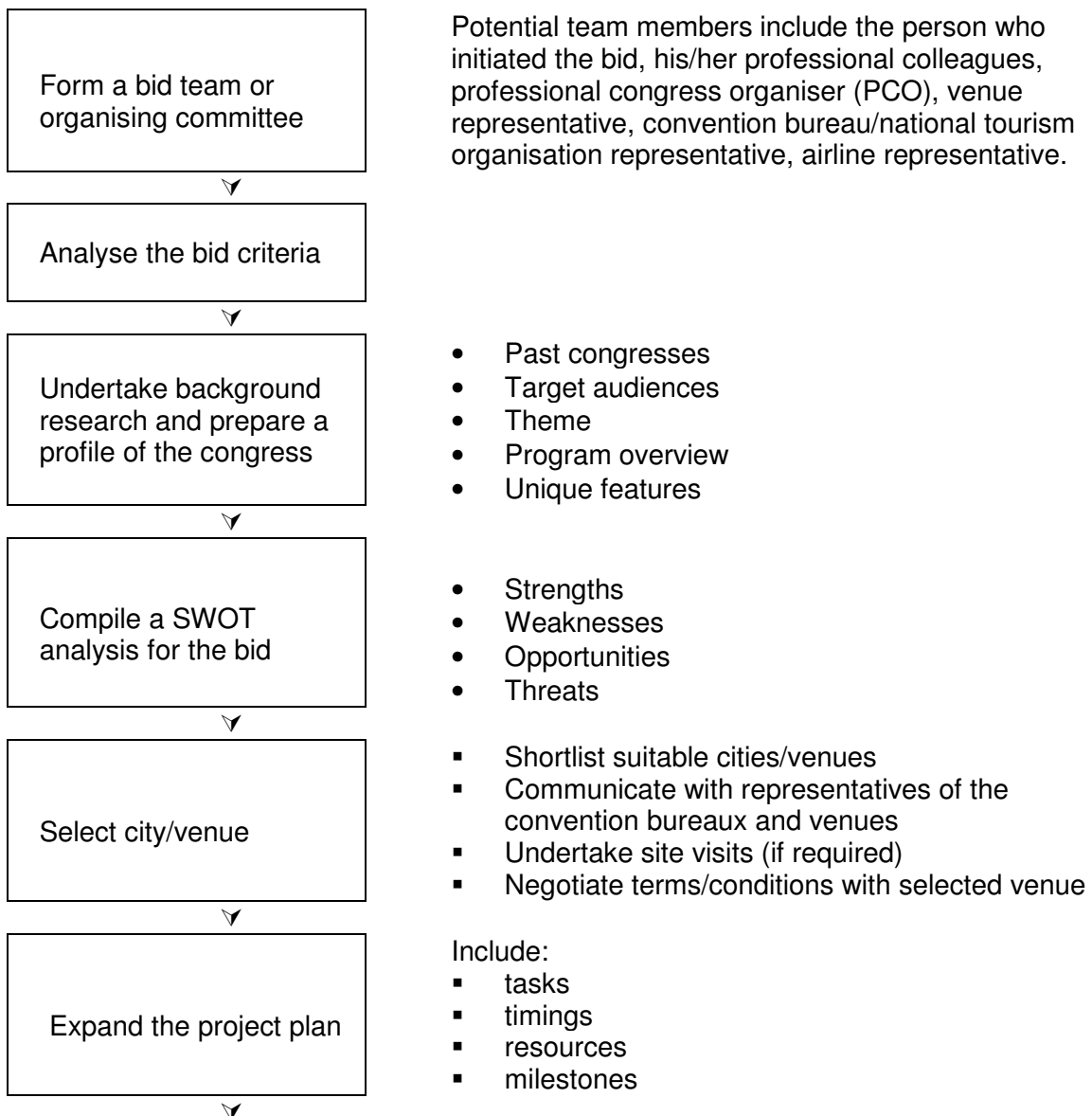
A strong local and/or national presence of related industry may give the bid an added financial value (additional fundraising, exhibition, national delegates, ...)

It is accepted practice that the representative from the PCO steers the bid along with the initiator.

## PROJECT MANAGING THE BID

Preparing a project plan for the bid brings order to the process, highlights the deadlines and assigns responsibilities.

Elements of the project plan include:



Prepare a bid budget and confirm funding



Prepare a congress budget and confirm availability of an appropriate level of seed funding



Enlist the support of other appropriate parties



Confirm bid components



Design the logo for the bid



Produce the bid documents



Plan any presentations to be made (according to the given timeframe) and prepare any supporting audio-visual material



Consider:

- funding from local convention industry operators
- support with travel from the airline
- sponsors

It is important to check the financial viability of the project before proceeding any further.

- International colleagues who will endorse your bid
- colleagues (local or offshore) who can provide advice and/or assist with lobbying
- convention bureau to produce the bid document
- airline which can provide a discount on travel to present the bid
- sponsors

For example:

- pre-bid lobbying
- bid document
- audio-visual presentation

Work within any guidelines stipulated in the bid invitation document.

Bid documents need to be eye-catching and informative. Include:

- Letters of invitation and support
- Executive summary
- Destination information
- Programs (scientific, social, activities)
- Venue information
- Financial information
- PCO profile
- Travel and accommodation

Audio visual material could include:

- powerpoint presentation
- video
- logo
- images of the host country

Organise a display stand (if appropriate)



Organise hospitality to be provided in conjunction with the bid



Organise promotional items to give away



Organise logistics associated with the bid



Rehearse the presentation



Make the bid



If any further information is required by the bid panel, prepare and submit it



If required, host a site inspection.

- book the best site possible
- hire furniture and equipment
- plan the display and stand activities

For example:

- hospitality suite
- catered function

Check on any restrictions in bringing a large number of promotional items into the country where the bid will be made.

For example

- excess baggage allowance
- custom restrictions
- visas

The project plan may not be as linear as suggested by the client and may need to be adapted to the individual circumstances of the bid.

## SWOT ANALYSIS (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

Prepare a SWOT analysis in the early stages of planning so that you can capitalise on strengths and opportunities to help win the bid, turn attention away from any weaknesses and work out strategies to overcome threats. Careful analysis should also be done of any key competitors with a view to countering their claims and creating points for difference with your bid. Ideas for consideration include:

### Strengths

- A member or members of the organisation based in the host country hold office within the organisation, e.g. President, Executive Secretary.
- Acknowledged experts in the profession are based in the host country.
- Suitable convention and exhibition facilities.
- Appealing destination.
- Excellent supporting infrastructure e.g. transport, hotels, restaurants.
- Destination has successfully hosted conventions of a similar size and scope.
- Close working relationship amongst the key suppliers e.g. PCO, convention bureau, venues, airlines, hotels.
- Exchange rate (if favourable for the majority of the delegates).

### Weaknesses

- Available meeting facilities do not exactly match the convention's requirements.
- Professional group in the host country is relatively small and/or not well known.
- An adequate level of seed funding for the project is not guaranteed.
- Not all members of the professional group in the host country are committed to the bid.
- Host country has not hosted a convention of a similar size and scope.
- Local convention industry is not united in its support for the bid.
- Exchange rate (if unfavourable for the majority of the delegates).

### Opportunities

- Convention has never been held in the country or region.
- Professional group in the host country has a high profile/excellent reputation internationally
- Convenor is well respected internationally.
- Venue is determined by rotation, e.g. a northern hemisphere venue followed by a southern hemisphere venue.
- Local convention industry is willing to provide professional support in preparing the bid.
- Destination is perceived to be safe.
- Local industry presence to provide financial support

### Threats

- Likelihood of a bid being submitted by a country in the same geographical region.
- Long travelling time from countries which are traditionally well represented at the convention.
- Hotels and the airline are unable to provide as many complimentary rooms/airline seats as those in competing countries.
- If the convention must take place in the high season, airfares and accommodation rates may be uncompetitive.
- Other destinations are bidding for a second time.
- Aggressive lobbying by competitors.
- Political instability (real or perceived) in the host country/region.
- Concerns about personal security in the host country.
- Fluctuating exchange rate, i.e. costs are unpredictable.

## BID COMPONENTS

### Background research

Research past congresses and identify factors which could sway the bid. Contact with the international organisation, previous host committees or previous PCOs could result in valuable advice being provided.

### Budget for the bid

A budget for the bid process needs to be agreed by all the bid's stakeholders. It would include: site visits by the selection committee; the bid document including logo development; travel to present the bid; marketing campaign to the voting delegates and Organising Committee meetings.

### Budget for Congress

A budget for the Congress needs to be prepared to reassure the international organisation that the host country is capable of hosting the Congress. This document is prepared by the PCO.

### Logistics

- Programme Overview: an outline of how the organising committee would manage the professional program.
- Venue: source an appropriate venue/s for the Congress.
- Dates: if there are fixed date ranges for the Congress then the competing destinations would need to select the most favourable dates for their particular area.
- Social Programme: the Organising Committee needs to identify suitable social activities for Congress participants.
- Excursions: technical tours and/or social tours.
- Local Industry Sponsorship: support in principle from major industry supporters would be beneficial to the bid and could include gifts.
- Lobbying/Politics: the background research would identify how the voting procedure is managed by the international association. With this information the Organising Committee can determine the best method of reaching as many voting delegates as possible. This is an area where the inside knowledge of the workings of the group is essential to the outcome of the bid.
- Bid Presentation: this information is generally identified in the formal bid criteria prepared by the International Society. The Bid Organising Committee needs to determine the strategy for the presentation of the bid to the voting delegates.
- Bid Document: this contains many sections and should include the destination's response to the formal bid criteria if there is one set; letters of support from various city officials; industry overview in the bidding city and country; Congress budget; letter of intent to bid by the host association; destination information; sponsorship strategy; program outline; Congress venue information and PCO information. This needs to be a professionally prepared document that can be sent either electronically or in hard copy.

### Formal response to the bid criteria

Often the international organisation has a set of formal criteria that must be responded to by each competing destination. Regardless of the other promotional information submitted with the bid, if this criteria is not responded to, the efforts of the bid Organising Committee would be worthless.

## SITE INSPECTION ARRANGEMENTS

This visit is extremely important and needs enormous involvement, not only from the PCO but also from the Governmental Authorities, the Convention and Visitors' Bureau; hotel partners, local airline, transportation supplier and, of course, the Convention Center. The involvement of the President of the National Society may also be of great importance by addressing professional issues and by meeting with the representative(s) of the International Society.

An accurate schedule has to be prepared by the PCO and sent in advance, not only to the members of the international committee arriving in the city, but also to all those involved in the site inspection.

### Important tips for a successful Site Inspection:

- excellent research by Local Host Committee in order to have a broad understanding of the inspectors' needs
- providing floor plans of the Convention Center/venue to inspectors prior to the visit
- knowledge of guidelines for past congresses, both successful and unsuccessful (or a congress profile if guidelines are not available)
- obtaining information about other countries/cities which are bidding and making sure to comment on the unique selling points that make the difference to "sell" your destination.
- inspectors should be accompanied throughout the whole inspection visit by professionals who know the geography, history and culture of the bidding country as well as an extensive knowledge of the city able to answer questions and clarify particular points
- visiting a selection of hotels that cover the wide range of accommodation needs (from VIP to student accommodation) including the headquarters hotel (if there is one)
- Convention Center/venue staff must be involved in the site inspection
- having a technician on hand during the site inspection to cover any technical questions and other important related aspects
- a representative from the Convention Bureau should be involved (if existing)

One of the most important and critical points of a site inspection is transparency. To achieve this, people involved in the site inspection must be prepared to answer any and all questions in the most satisfactory way possible, e.g. security; infrastructure; transportation; accommodation; distances from Convention Center to official hotels; weather; local and national tourism, amongst many others.

## CONCLUSION

As a result of globalization, increased professionalism and an excellent interchange of information, the success of a bid is highly influenced by the team work and effort. If all team members work together in harmony, fulfil their role and undertake their responsibility, there is a very good chance of achieving the common goal: **To win the bid!**

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## Endorsement

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