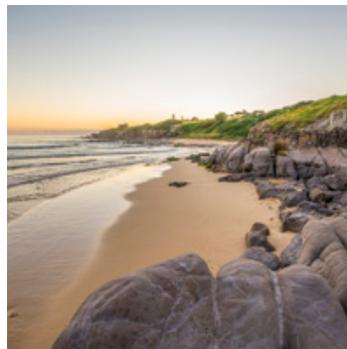




NSW REGIONAL CONFERRNCING TOOLKIT

TOOLS & TIPS OF THE TRADE
FOR REGIONAL BUSINESS EVENT SUPPLIERS
– FROM NOVICE TO VETERAN –



MINISTER'S INTRODUCTION

Increasing regional conferencing and other business events in rural and regional NSW is a key goal of the NSW Government. We have established a Regional Conferencing Unit within the Government's tourism and major events agency, Destination NSW and have resourced the unit appropriately to deliver growth strategies and promotional plans to sell the benefits of meeting in Australia's most geographically diverse State. This Toolkit has been especially designed for rural and regional NSW suppliers or those considering entering the business events arena to assist them in growing their business and achieving even greater success.

The Toolkit should assist suppliers to:

- › Better understand the business events markets and current trends
- › Clarify operators' potential to develop their own target markets
- › Provide ideas on how to build marketing networks
- › Information on how to respond to event bids and requests for proposals (RFPs)
- › Ideas to add value to bids, tenders or proposals
- › Tips on how to successfully host an industry familiarisation program
- › Ways to measure success and set goals and targets
- › Tips on how to lift suppliers' profile and meet the professional standards business event buyers expect.

This Toolkit is aimed at various levels of experience and the more experienced operators will be able to scan the document to refresh their knowledge and look for new ideas. For novices or those who have only been in the business events market for a short amount of time, it is recommended to read the complete document to gain a comprehensive view of the market, the industry terminology that is used and ideas they can use to build their market share.

Rural and regional NSW offer great meeting facilities, unique social programs and field study tour opportunities as well as a huge array of pre and post touring options.

I wish you all great success in building not only your business but the greater Visitor Economy for NSW.



Adam Marshall
Minister for Tourism and Major Events



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1. UNDERSTANDING THE BUSINESS

1.1 DIFFERENCE FROM THE LEISURE MARKET

If you are new to the industry, you need to be aware that Business Events clients and individual delegates have different requirements from the leisure market or major public event organisers. The business events market requires different marketing strategies and has specific infrastructure needs.

The Business Events sector is receiving growing attention across Australia and the world because of its high-yield nature. Business Events delegates consistently outspend the traditional leisure tourist.

As the market increasingly recognises the value of this business, competition increases and marketing is less generic and targets different needs.

Business events are lucrative but they need special attention to secure, deliver and gain repeat business.

Initial decision-making on the location of the business event is made by the event client, in some cases on the recommendation of the contracted conference or events organiser or a venue booking agency.

Within the market, there are different types of business events, depending on the style of program and the host client. These are explained in more detail in this Toolkit.

LEISURE MARKET

Individual destination decision
Holiday, Rest & Recreation
Price, access
Flexible timing
Seasonality
Wide range of standards
Leisure activities
Unique individual appeal
Agents, wholesalers, OTAs, direct FITs
Tourism suppliers

BUSINESS EVENTS MARKET

Host organisation destination decision
Business purpose
Price, access, size
Fixed dates
Different seasonality
Mainly 4 or 5 star
Focus on business program
Unique group activities
Client, PCOs, CTMs ++
Tourism suppliers + specialists

1.2 WHAT ARE BUSINESS EVENTS?

“Business events” is a generic term which covers an array of terminologies. The commonality across all terms is the business purpose that is at the heart of the events.

The recognised industry definition of a Business Event is a public or private activity that consists of a minimum of 15 delegates who meet with a common interest or vocation. There are many different names used to cover the “conference” or “meetings” market such as:

- › Conferences
- › Conventions
- › Congresses
- › Technical/field/study trips
- › Satellite meetings
(Smaller meetings held pre/post a larger, usually international, convention)
- › Workshops
- › Short courses
- › Symposia
- › Forums
- › Seminars
- › Training programs
- › Promotions/
Product launches
- › Marketing and sales meetings
- › Information days
- › Board meetings
- › Annual General Meetings/Extraordinary General Meetings
- › Bootcamps
- › Corporate Retreats
- › Incentives/corporate reward programs
- › Exhibitions
- › Trade shows
- › Special events with business purpose
e.g. Awards nights, corporate celebrations

The types of client categories include:

- › Associations
- › Corporations
- › Professional Conference Organisers and/or Meeting Planners
- › Exhibition Organisers

Each has different needs and event management approaches so the better you understand their key drivers, the better results you will enjoy.



1.3 MARKET SEGMENTS

1.3.1 Different types of clients or business event owners

The following are the four key segments which explain the characteristics of the “hosts” or owners of business events.

Association (Associations can be State, National or International) their core activities include:

- › Revenue raising
- › Membership contact activities
- › Continuing education and/or accreditation programs
- › Budgets driven by registration numbers and sponsorship
- › Often combined with exhibition or trade show components.

Government Meetings

- › Policy and process driven
- › Fixed budgets and very budget conscious
- › Protocol focus
- › Perception conscious (less focus on social activities) but can include ‘team building’ activities.

Corporate Meetings and Events

- › Communicating internally
- › Rewarding + recognising staff, suppliers, franchisees
- › Boosting team spirit
- › Promoting externally
- › Reactive to economic conditions
- › Fixed delegate numbers
- › Fixed budgets.

Entrepreneurial/Commercial

- › Gaps in niche markets identified for event opportunities
- › Often new market sectors, product promotions
- › Commercial owners
- › Heavily marketed
- › Profit driven
- › Anchored to specific destinations
- › Potential for joint ventures
- › Optional registrations.

Understanding the nature of different clients and their requests is critical because it will drive their decision-making regarding destination and venue selection, and options for programming. For instance, the Association market relies on the appeal of the business program, quality of the speakers and the destination opportunities and appeal to drive registrations which are essential to the success of the event. Often revenue from Association events is vital to the ongoing financial strength of the organisation. For many, their annual conference is their key revenue raiser so destination appeal and program content is key.

Corporations generally meet all the costs associated with the event within one budget, without optional individual registrations. Numbers are set and budgets inflexible as a general rule. With associations there is the potential to add extras to the program if good registration numbers are achieved and the budgeted delegated numbers are exceeded. Therefore delegate-boosting activities are essential. “Corporates”, depending on the style of the program, are often looking for an attractive destination which will appeal to the participants especially if there is an “incentive” or reward element involved. Unique ideas for team-building activities, for instance, can add real value.

Incentive programs are often run on an annual basis by companies to reward and recognise their top performers who might be employees or franchisees. These programs usually incorporate a business meeting, perhaps an Awards Night, and team activities, with the focus being on reward and fostering team spirit. There are individual travel incentives offered by some organisations: the focus in this document is on group programs which can vary in size from twenty to thousands. Often there is a VIP element, a focus on unique experiences, and an emphasis on high-quality delivery with a generous budget. Destination selection plays a large part in the desirability and success of the incentive travel reward events.

Government events are usually very business-focused with a tight budget, and minimal extra spend.

Entrepreneurial/Commercial events are similar to Association events in that they need to attract delegates to register, and they need to make a profit. Exhibitions and trade shows are often owned by commercial operators.

1.3.2 Key Industry Sectors

- › Medical/Pharmaceutical
- › Technology/IT/Communications
- › Financial/Commerce
- › Sciences/Social Sciences
- › Education/Academia
- › Industry/Management
- › Property/Building/Architecture
- › Automotive
- › Construction/Engineering
- › Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries
- › Environment & Ecology
- › Sports, Arts, Culture
- › Transport
- › Safety & Security
- › Energy, Oil, Gas
- › Government/NGOS
- › Administration/Human Resources.

There are thousands of associations in Australia of all sizes, most of which planning meetings and events of some sort throughout the year. While the big trade and professional associations make up the larger national and state meetings; in terms of numbers of events, companies produce the bulk of the business.

The association meetings are more easily identifiable, with websites providing good information on upcoming conferences and seminars.

Corporate business is much harder to identify because of the confidential nature of the information. There is no need to advertise their meetings online and often these meetings fly under the radar, known only to the organisers, specialty suppliers and venues hosting the event. Databases with details and contacts for corporate events are closely guarded. In the case of intermediaries such as event companies that manage these clients, often the venue is not advised of the client name until the business is confirmed which can make tailoring proposals difficult.



1.4 KEY FACTORS IN DESTINATION OR SITE SELECTION

Site selection is an art in itself and will differ depending on the type of business event, but generally these are the key determining factors:

- › Capacity
- › Location
- › Accessibility
- › Availability
- › Affordability
- › Standard of venues
- › Standard of accommodation
- › Local infrastructure/Facilities
- › Local support
- › Safety and security
- › Destination appeal.

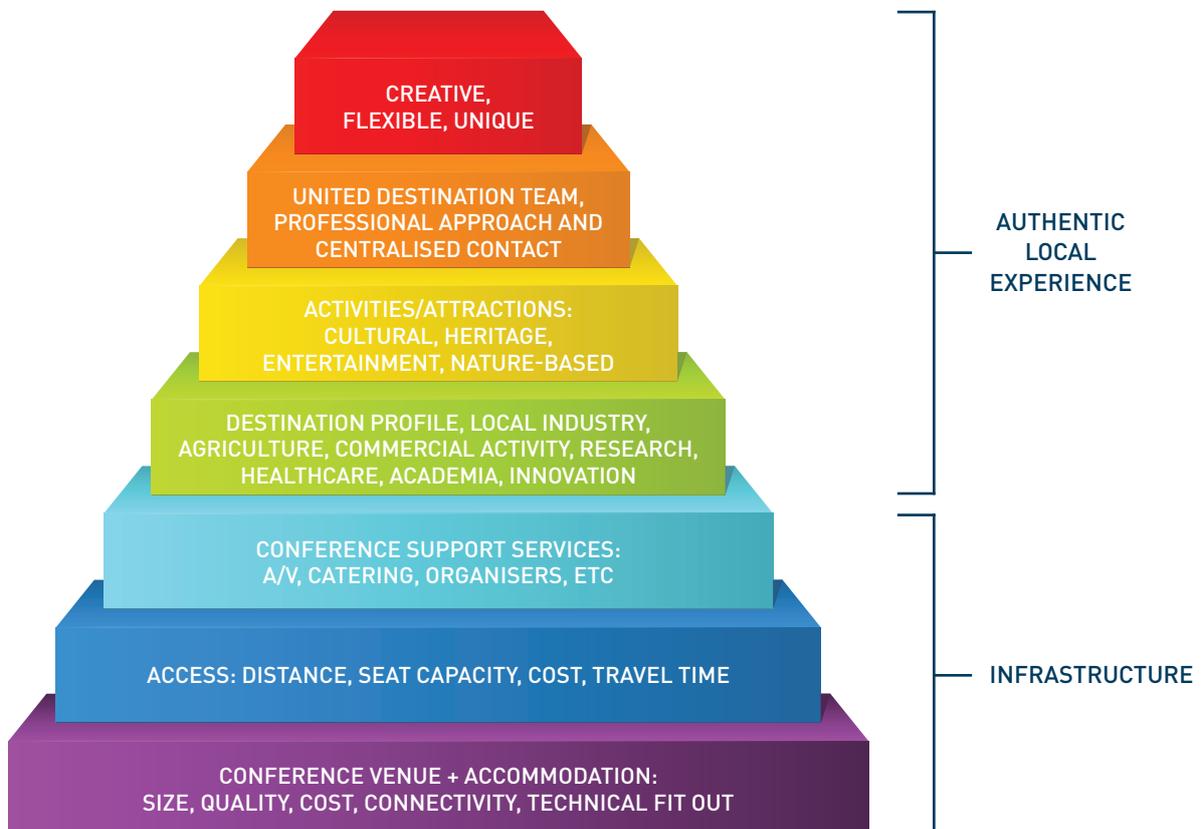
If your destination or venue can meet all the practical requirements (can it fit, can we get there, is it available and so on) and you make the shortlist and this is where all the important extras come into play.

1.5 CLIENT WISH LIST (OVER AND ABOVE THE BASICS)

The destinations with strong business events reputations that continue to attract good and repeat business tend to have:

- › A demonstrated strong team approach
- › A single, experienced point of contact
- › Consolidated easy to access information online
- › Creative Program Ideas
- › Authenticity of local product
- › Unique reasons to choose your destination
- › Tailored, personalised bids
- › Consistent quality standards
- › Professional approach and quick responses
- › Flexibility
- › Suppliers who understand the client’s business and event objectives
- › Local support if possible, via local subvention (underwriting of writing off certain costs) or access to sponsors.

BUSINESS EVENTS DESTINATION PYRAMID



1.6 DELEGATE BEHAVIOUR

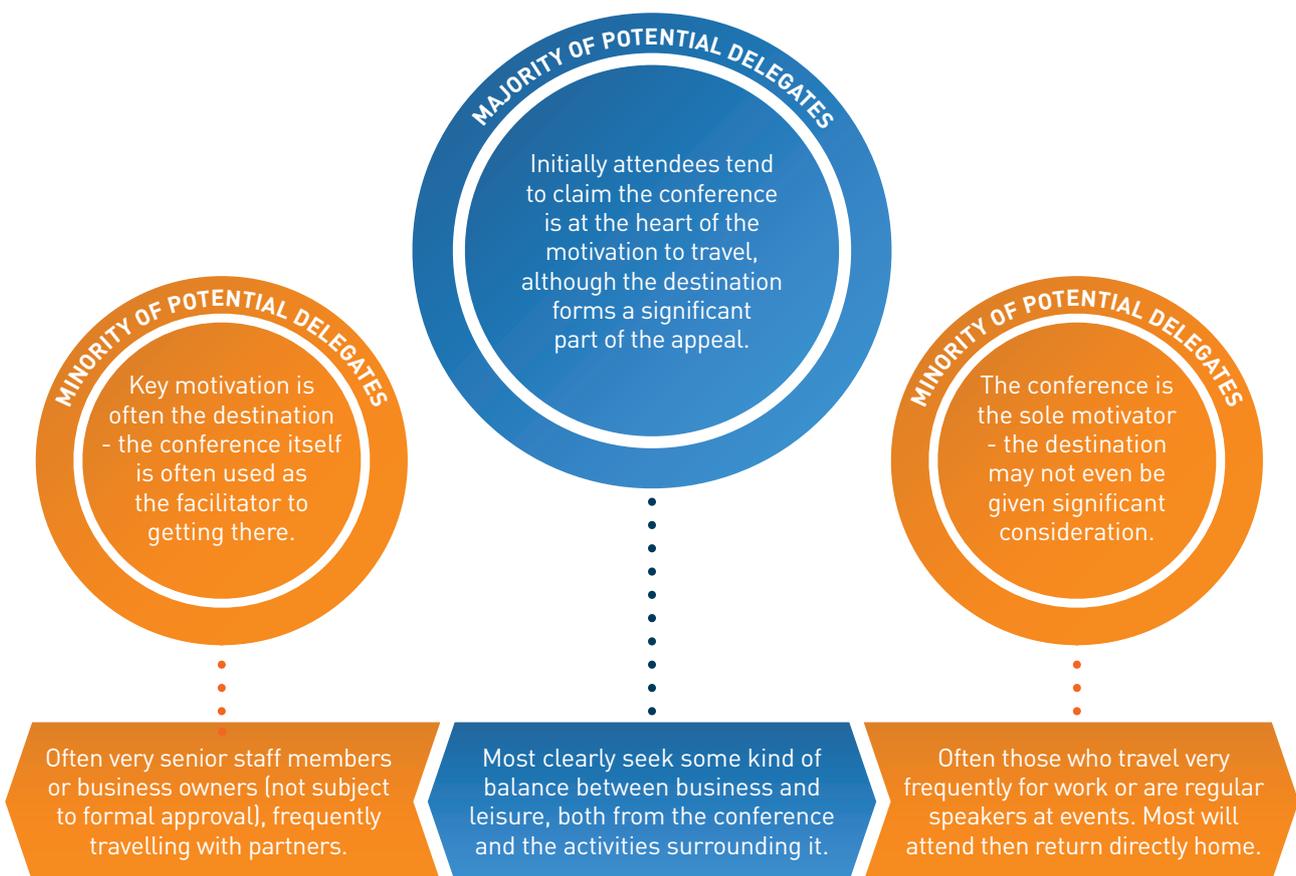
While corporate events do not normally offer optional registration, association conferences rely on stimulating the interest of their members to attend the conference. Delegate boosting strategies are vital to hosting successful association conferences.

There is an increasing tendency for “optional” delegates to leave doing their registration to attend the event to the last weeks or even days before the event, creating a challenge for the organisers and suppliers in finalising numbers and arrangements. This factor highlights the importance of a close working relationship between the organisers and suppliers to deal with late registrations.

The conference or event website is usually the main source of information for the delegate. It is the first point of contact for potential delegates and most registrations are now received online. Comprehensive website information is vital.

Refer also to Delegate Boosting 4.5.4.

Information below sourced from Tourism Australia’s research into association conferences, August 2016. While the focus was on international association delegates, many of the factors highlighted are relevant to national association events. The full report available on TA’s Business Events Australia website.



TIP! Ensure the conference organisers have important and stimulating information about your destination which is easy to load into the event website. Appealing aspects of the destination, along with travel and tour options will help inspire delegates to attend the event.

1.7 WHAT MAKES A PERFECT CONFERENCE?

- › Conferences that successfully manage to integrate the conference program with the attraction of the destination are the most appealing.
- › The strongest positive memories from previously attended conferences tend to extend beyond the conference itself so include ideas for pre and post conference touring in your region.
- › The experience commences with the conference website which must provide clear and compelling information on key speakers, networking opportunities and program content and social activities.
- › The conference website must be visually appealing and offer a “one-stop shop” for delegates to plan their trip. This includes destination information, accommodation, maps, public transport, the key attractions and activities, i.e. ‘the must-do’s’.
- › Offering a social program that includes networking events in scenic or iconic settings; choosing event venues that make leisure activities such as shopping, dining and sightseeing convenient; and providing opportunities to discover the destination are all highly appealing to delegates.
- › A lot of time is invested in evaluating conferences and communicating staggered, earlybird packages that offer special pricing and clear deadlines work hard to drive visitation. These should be a consideration for any conference.

CONFERENCE ESSENTIALS

There are key components of a conference that delegates consider essential to attendance.

1. Quality program content	72%
2. That you can extend the trip into a holiday	61%
3. A desirable destination	60%
4. Opportunities for professional networking	59%
5. Colleagues/Peers you know are attending	56%
6. Lots of activities at the destination	56%
7. Discounted accommodation around the conference	55%
8. Being able to take family/friends with you	54%
9. Contribution to professional accreditation	53%
10. People have recommended the conference	53%
11. Well-known speakers	49%
12. High-profile delegates	48%

Source: Tourism Australia’s research into association conferences, August 2016



When bidding for association conferences, include suggestions in your bid documents or proposals that take into account the key points mentioned above.





2. BUSINESS EVENTS TRENDS

2.1 CLIENT: BIG PICTURE TRENDS

- ▶ More client focus on specifying then delivering event objectives and measuring return on investment (ROI). This is an ongoing impact from the 2008/09 global financial crises, resulting in many corporate clients taking a much closer look at the purpose and output from their events and shareholder disenchantment with 'lavish' events.
- ▶ Growth of 'green' meetings and environmental impacts of meeting.
- ▶ Increasing number of community outreach programs by organisations wishing to connect and give back to the local community through or during their conference in some ways, especially those organisations with strong Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs.
- ▶ Increasing expectations by potential clients to expect subvention (financial and in-kind support from the bidding destination) leading to more bargaining and "horse trading" at the site selection stage.
- ▶ Rise of new meeting formats e.g. Open Space Learning, Field Study Tours, to add pizzazz and delegate engagement in programs. Delegates seen more as "participants" than a passive audience.
- ▶ Rise of security and safety issues, with company directors increasingly aware of their "duty of care" for employees and delegates. This is leading to more comprehensive risk management plans and increased security budgets, plus impacts on destination selection.
- ▶ New focus on nutritional factors: healthy foods, "brain" foods, different menus to suit different times of day to boost energy and stimulate the brain.
- ▶ Increase in number of special dietary requests: for example, vegetarian/vegan, gluten free, food allergies, international preferences for say Indian, Chinese, Middle Eastern food options.
- ▶ Increase interest in using non-traditional or unique venues as a change from the traditional convention centres and hotel meeting space.
- ▶ Rise of new technologies and new strategic approaches to meeting management, especially in corporate sphere, focussing on procurement policies, budget controls, preferred suppliers, risk management and tracking expenditure. For example, a new process called Strategic Meetings Management (SMM).
- ▶ Ongoing trend of shorter lead times, especially for corporate events, and shorter meetings because of time limits and costs. This leads to travelling time becoming an important factor impacting overall duration of time out of office.
- ▶ Rise of live face-to-face business events as a marketing and promotional tool used by companies and the concomitant increase in the number of marketing agencies servicing this event market.



- › In the large sector of pharmaceutical (Pharma) and medical meetings, new stricter codes of conduct are impacting commercial sponsorship of events. More transparency and reporting is now required. Pharma company sponsorship of social events at medical meetings has reduced dramatically, replaced to some extent by support for educational sessions.
- › Rise of new associations as a result of increasing specialisation and new topics have led to new events being created. For example, climate change meetings, new branches of medicine, artificial intelligence, video game developers etc.
- › Where there is a perceived gap in the market, or market opportunity, there is a growth of entrepreneurial events (for example, TEDX conferences) and increase in number of traditional communication companies moving into live broadcast events (for example, print media). Some entrepreneurs are very creative in their approaches, with trendy creative business events taking on a festival-style feel (for example, SouthbySouthWest in the USA).
- › Tendency for cloning of successful global business events into new regional sister events, and in some cases, the merging or co-location of events of a similar nature into a major themed brand.
- › Some indications of more regionalisation of events at a global level. For instance, in some cases a North American or Pan European congress outgrowing the size of the traditional international congress.
- › Increase in the number of Asian or Asia Pacific meetings and incentives with the rise of the professional middle class, trade associations, and multinational companies located in the Asian region.
- › Drop in size of accommodation blocks booked by conference organisers for optional registration meetings such as association congresses, due to individual delegates booking their own accommodation direct online and not through the conference organiser.
- › There is an increasing blurring of the lines between the types of events. For example, trade exhibitions are running comprehensive educational programs, incentives often include a meeting component, and some congresses rely on the success of their trade exhibition.



2.2 SUPPLIER: BIG PICTURE TRENDS

- › Changes in Business Events destination branding. A move to “Smart” branding, promoting “brains not beauty” of the destination. Part of an overall, more sophisticated approach to promote a destination’s “intelligence” factor, knowledge hubs and centres of excellence in specific industries or professions.
- › Increase in industry advocacy to Governments and the wider community of the benefits of business events beyond the high-yield delegate spend. This has seen a greater appreciation of the sector by politicians, although the industry acknowledges there is still much work to be done in this space. With this move is the increase demand for quality research and statistics on the industry.
- › The acronym “MICE” (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) is being overtaken by the term “Business Events”.
- › Strong united destination approach to boost the strengths of bids (i.e. regions collaborating).
- › Ongoing increase in competition and business event infrastructure globally and locally. For example, rapid rise in number of state-of-art convention centres in major cities and growth of regional convention centres around the world.
- › Rise of the Integrated Resort (IR) which incorporates large convention/exhibition spaces.
- › Growth of destination and major suppliers’ alliances globally through “co-opertition” approaches, branding and sharing of leads and market research.
- › Growth of business events “Ambassador” programs by Convention Bureau and major convention centres which involves establishing a formal network of leading local professionals and business people who advocate the destination for business events and identify leads.
- › Maturing of approach by major convention bureaux and centres in filtering bid opportunities and allocated resources to develop customised bids.
- › Some evidence of Bureaux and major Convention Centres moving towards more joint ventures in establishing new annual anchor events to lock in repeat business.
- › Globalisation (and consolidation) of some major suppliers to the industry. For example, global convention centre management companies, global conference organising companies.
- › Rise of big intermediaries in the business events industry. For example, increasing number of corporate travel management companies (CTMs) entering the business events market and establishing new departments to service this market. The consolidation of corporate travel and meetings management identified as a significant trend.
- › Disrupters such as Airbnb entering the corporate meetings market.
- › Ongoing post global financial crises (GFC) perceptions of conferences/incentives are being wasteful has resulted in more industry advocacy efforts to promote the broader benefits of business events beyond the obvious tourism spend.
- › Emerging major aviation hubs are impacting destination selection because of ease of access. For example, Dubai, Shanghai, Bangkok. The rise of low cost carriers has seen delegates choosing these more economical options.
- › There are more public/private partnerships in the development of major infrastructure such as convention and exhibition centres.
- › Rise in commercially-run association management companies which also service association events.
- › Emergence of a new industry discipline known as “meeting architects” who specialise in designing stimulating fresh program, customised to specific business events.
- › Venues leading the “green meetings” movement, many with strong environmental policies (e.g. one major chain offering to offset an event’s carbon emissions).
- › More creative ideas from meeting venues for F&B and meeting space formats.



2.3 TECHNOLOGY: BIG PICTURE TRENDS

Technology is possibly the biggest change agent in the business events industry over the past two decades. Some of the major aspects are:

- › Online registration systems have taken much of the drudgery out of processing registrations.
- › Paperless conferences are now possible thanks to online information and event mobile apps allowing the delegate to access program information re-event and onsite.
- › More conferences sessions are being offered online in real-time or stored online for delegates to watch later. Many of these conferences have developed as hybrids, with both a live and online audience.
- › There has been an explosion in “webinars”.
- › Some major organisations, and meeting properties, have invested in Skype and teleconference units in boardroom environments to offer virtual live meetings and save on travel costs.
- › WiFi broadband access has become critical to most organisers.
- › Automatic Requests for Proposals (RFPs) have become commonplace as quick online options for busy organisers, and venue finders.
- › Onsite audience interactive systems are increasingly being used for voting on AGM resolutions and providing feedback on conference sessions, and require a stable WiFi system within the property.
- › Online ‘Event Curation’ is a new discipline, needing experts in social media to report on event happenings, run live conference blogs, and to respond to online communities. Similarly, online moderators are needed to ensure ‘live’ webinars and the like are conducted effectively.



3. DEVELOPING A MARKETING PLAN FOR THE BUSINESS EVENTS SECTOR

Every supplier should regularly re-examine their strengths and weaknesses. You should know who your main competitors are, and why. You should have identified your unique selling points (USPs).

Short, medium and long term goals need to be defined for your business, along with your performance measurement criteria and tools to track your performance.

3.1 REALITY CHECK: THE BASICS FOR VENUES AND DESTINATIONS ENTERING THE MARKET

Every venue wishing to attract business events needs fact sheets on their websites which provide and specify:

- › Total capacity
- › Floor plans which show all meeting spaces, pre-function foyer areas, exhibition space
- › Food and Beverage menus
- › Total accommodation rooms and star rating
- › WiFi availability and strength of broadband/NBN
- › Audio-visual equipment and services.

Many venues take the opportunity to promote leisure activities in their region and develop unique team building/group activity opportunities available at their property.

Local Convention Bureaux or Councils should have conducted a complete audit of meeting facilities within their region to provide in a comprehensive overview.

Potential clients need to be able to quickly see if your destination has the capacity to host their events, plus obtain information on travel time and transport options: air, rail, road from Sydney and other key markets depending on location. For instance, transport options could include Gold Coast airport for Far North Coast locations, Canberra for nearby destinations, Melbourne for Murray region, Adelaide for Broken Hill.

Additional information on local suppliers is valuable. For instance: local coach companies, caterers, special event organisers, entertainers, unique venues, staging and theme party companies, equipment hire companies, case studies on previous conferences held.

A number of NSW regions and towns already have conference/event websites with some offering downloadable conference guides. Review them to gain ideas on how to improve your own offering.

TIP!

Benchmark your online information with other similar venues or regions. See the breadth of information and the creative format of what your competitors are providing. Once you ensure you have the basic information in place, add some flair with ideas and options for potential clients and reasons why they should consider your destination or property. Use testimonials of satisfied past clients.



3.2 KNOWING YOUR TARGETS: DECISION MAKERS AND DECISION INFLUENCERS

Your initial contact for a potential business event will probably come through an intermediary however, it is important to know where the ultimate decision regarding site selection will come. Decision-makers vary depending on the type of event and can range from a CEO's Secretary to a full Board or association membership vote.

DECISION MAKERS

Intermediaries may offer advice and recommendations, but the decision on site selection will rest with the owners of events. These decision makers could be:

Corporate: Chief/Senior Executives in the Events, Marketing, Promotion, or Training Departments, Procurement Department, an Executive Assistant or by a Board, depending on the size and importance of the event.

Association: Committee/Board level, through to the CEO and managers of the Conference/Events/Professional Education Units.

Government: Minister/Department Head or senior level through specific section personnel and intermediaries.

Entrepreneurial/commercial operators: Owner of company and/or key project staff.

DECISION INFLUENCERS

Professional Conference Organisers (PCO); in-house meetings/event managers; Association Management Companies (AMC); Destination Management Companies (DMC); event companies; public relations or advertising agencies; travel agents (Corporate Travel Management Companies CTM, Travel Management Company TMC); online travel agents (OTA); venue booking agents.

OTHER INFLUENCERS

Local Convention Bureau; online information; media articles, word of mouth.



3.3 DEFINING YOUR MARKET BASE

In developing your marketing plan, you need to realistically and clearly identify your key targets, categorising your database in order of priority and type.

Depending on your location, your main focus may be local, regional, state or interstate. For instance, the Far North Coast might target South East Queensland. Snowy Mountains and South Coast might add in Canberra as a key target in addition to the NSW market. Those within two hours travelling distance from major cities might attract field study tours or satellite meetings or day tours from international delegates to attending international conventions in those cities.

Your first step is to review past business to identify the main historical sources of your business events. Repeat business is crucial to most properties so these sources are your best starting point. Ask yourself:

- › Who is your biggest client?
- › What types of business are you attracting?
- › Why do you win that business? Price? Service?
- › What is your most successful event?

If you don't know, find out!

Once this is established, you can consider additional targets.

CREATING YOUR TARGET MATRIX

Association	Global	Conferences	15 - 50 pax	5 Star
Corporate	Asia Pacific	Courses / Seminars	50 - 100 pax	4 Star
	AUS / NZ		100 - 250 pax	2 / 3 Star
Government	National	Field Trips	250 - 500 pax	
Entrepreneurs	State	Satellite mtgs	500 - 1000 pax	
	Regional	AGMs	1000 - 2000 pax	
	Local	Corporate incentives	2000+ pax	
			In-house mtgs	
		Product launches		
		Retreats		
		Trade Shows		
		Special purpose		

Add fields into your database which allow you to identify the category of the contact. For example, host organisation, PCO, DMC, CTM and so on.

TIP!

3.4 THE CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF YOUR DATABASE

The most vital part of any business events marketing plan is a well-maintained database of past clients, potential clients and people who have made enquiries but not yet booked.

The database needs to be much more than simple names and contact details. Consider fields which identify:

- › Key Contact Person
- › Contact Report: last time contact was made, details of same which should indicate what degree of interest in your destination, what barriers, next opportunity to bid
- › Organisation name and website if available
- › Host - association/corporate/government/institution/entrepreneur
- › Geographic type of event – local/state/national/international
- › Industry sector e.g. medical/pharma/financial/automotive/real estate/agricultural
- › Approximate range or size of event
- › Details of any past events held onsite – meeting space used, days, special requests, accommodation rooms, etc
- › Name of any local contact associated with the host organisation

- › Other destinations/properties previously used by the client (if known)
- › Reference to any post event reports on file.

The more information you are able to enter into your database, the more valuable it will be, especially where staff turnover means historical detail can be lost unless recorded.

Consider categories which easily enable you to identify past clients, repeat clients, priority targets, and possible targets.

Add a wide range of contacts into your database which could be of assistance and categorise them accordingly e.g. local network (see below), suppliers, important contacts such as local doctors on call, hospital, police, and so on. These additional contacts will help you develop risk management plans.

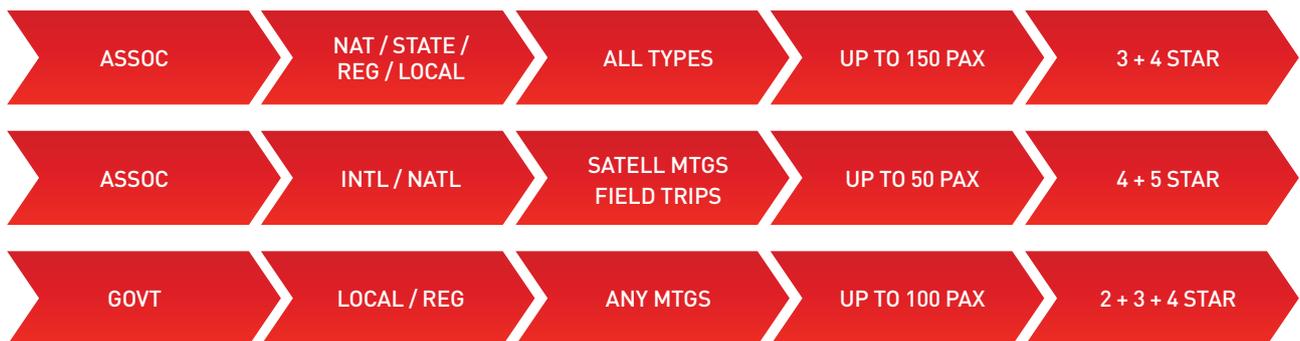
The database must be maintained to retain its integrity and usefulness. Allocate time and resources to do this. Consider investing in CRM software which allows you to develop a sophisticated database interface with your customer base. On a regular basis e.g. newsletters.

3.5 IDENTIFYING YOUR COMPETITIVE SET

Once you have identified your current market and possible future target markets, you need to understand your competition. Note what destinations and/or specific properties which you are continually competing against for business. Once you have clarified your “competitive set” (those destinations and/or properties with similar characteristics and with which you regularly compete), ensure you have done research on your competitors to better understand their marketing strategies (branding, trade show presence, advertising, and online presence) and how you can match, better or differentiate yourself from them.



YOUR BUSINESS EVENT PROFILE



3.6 BUILDING YOUR NETWORK AND IDENTIFYING YOUR POTENTIAL

Having a good understanding of your local industries and professional and academic strengths provides a good base from which to seek valuable local contacts and find leads for potential business events which might be interested in coming to your destination.

Stretch your mind to consider new avenues, new opportunities, new offers, and ways to leverage existing conference business.

For instance, your destination might be a centre of excellence for cotton growing; it might have a large number of aged care facilities; it may have a large number of beef producers; perhaps it has a university campus specialising in a particular discipline. Take for example the International Temperate Rice Growing Conference held in Griffith March 2017, or the Wagyu Beef Conference in Albury in May 2017, or the regional NSW field "Wheat" field study trip connected to the International Wheat Conference held in Sydney in September 2014.

For more information go to meetinnsw.com.au/testimonials



TIP!

Are you a member of your local Chamber of Commerce? How strong is your relationship with your local Council or Uni or TAFE? Do you have leading professionals, academics and business people in your region on your database and have you established a relationship with them in an effort to identify and build events/sales leads? Leading local figures are often very supportive in efforts to attract business to the area. There may be diamonds in your midst waiting to be uncovered!

3.7 ANALYSING YOUR MARKETING STRATEGIES AND SALES SUPPORT

What is your marketing mix? For example are you doing:

- › Sales Calls
- › Trade Shows
- › Advertisements
- › Public Relations
- › Direct Mail, Campaigns
- › Telemarketing
- › Organising Famils/Site Visits by Key Decision Makers
- › Educational Seminars
- › Internet/Social Media Posts?

What is your most successful sales or marketing activity?

- › What give you the best results for the least money or is it expensive but you get consistent quality sales leads?

To which associations or professional organisations do you belong?

- › Are they potential clients and/or are they members

Review the sales support materials you currently have:

- › Brochures, videos, slides, tour shells
- › Price lists, photographs/footage of previous events
- › Testimonials.

Benchmark everything you have with your competition. How do your major competitors market themselves? For example sales blitzes, entertaining (client dinners and presentations), famils, direct mail, advertising. Note any trade magazine supplements, videos, posters, collateral materials, listings in trade directories, internet presence, special offers or incentives such as free local travel.

Know your competition! Don't be afraid to ask potential clients, or 'lost clients', why they chose an alternative. Consider what needs improvement to lift your profile and offer.

TIP!

4. BIDDING FOR BUSINESS

4.1 THE BACKGROUND TO BIDDING

Bidding for business means different things to different suppliers. It can range from responding to a Request to Tender to submitting a formal bid document or proposal to simply providing a quotation.

Destination Bids – these can be submitted by a town or regional convention bureau, Destination Networks one-off project teams and /or local councils. Bidding at this level is an art form in itself. It requires strong coordination skills to draw together all aspects of the destination and match these to the bid requirements. A local committee may be formed to work on the bid. Subvention (underwriting or discounting certain costs of the event) may come into play in these bids (see below). In many cases, the bid is part of a two- stage process commencing with a call for Expressions of Interest by the client to specific destinations which is then filtered to a short list calling for more detailed bid proposals.

Venue Bids – these are the most common types of bids at a regional level. The key potential host property prepares and lodges the bid, often drawing on input from local suppliers and organisations. Venues may also seek local support or Government subvention to enhance the bid: for example, from local council or the aligned State Government Department or Agency. Sometimes the call for bids is more commonly referred to as a Request for Proposal (RFP) or a Request for Tender (RFT).

Other Suppliers – once the destination or specific regional property has won the bid, local suppliers may then submit their own quotations or responses to requests for proposals (RFPs). The potential client may source local suppliers from information online or recommendations. Often the venue or destination contact is a prime source for local supplies. In many cases, the venues already have working relationships with local suppliers whom they recommend to clients.

In the major capitals, convention bureaus often team with local host associations to bid for a major national or international congress. Often the city convention bureau identifies an important corporate piece of business which may consider its destination and starts the process of lodging a bid to attract the event to its destination.

Why do local Associations bid to host an event?

Answers vary and can be a combination of factors:

- › The association's turn to put its hand up as the event rotates geographically around the state or nation
- › The prestige that hosting the event would bring to the local body
- › The revenue which might be made from the event to fund the association's activities
- › The potential benefits to local members
- › The decision to bid fits with the association's wider objectives e.g. to increase membership in regional areas
- › There is pressure from the national or international body to bid.

Many associations do not have the resources or the expertise to mount a professional bid. This is where the local convention bureau plays an important role.



TIP!

Local suppliers such as event organisers, production companies, coach hire companies, caterers etc should have a strong relationship with key contacts in their destination and key meeting facilities or hotel properties as they are likely to be the first port of call for business events decision makers.

Why Do Convention Bureaux or Destinations mount bids for business events?

- › It is the convention bureau’s main reason for existing – to generate visitor revenue for its members and the city
- › The high yield returns, with daily expenditure higher than the leisure tourist
- › To fill low/shoulder seasons for the city’s accommodation properties and convention space
- › To showcase city and add to its prestige and profile
- › To boost regional dispersal with pre and post touring
- › Respond to Government backing for specific events which match the Government’s strategies
- › Respond to a request from the local host organisation to assist with a bid.

Bidding at this level can be an expensive business and is not undertaken lightly. Destinations consider carefully the likelihood of winning, the costs involved, and the match of the event for their destination before committing to the time intensive process of bidding.

What Do Convention Bureaux bid on?

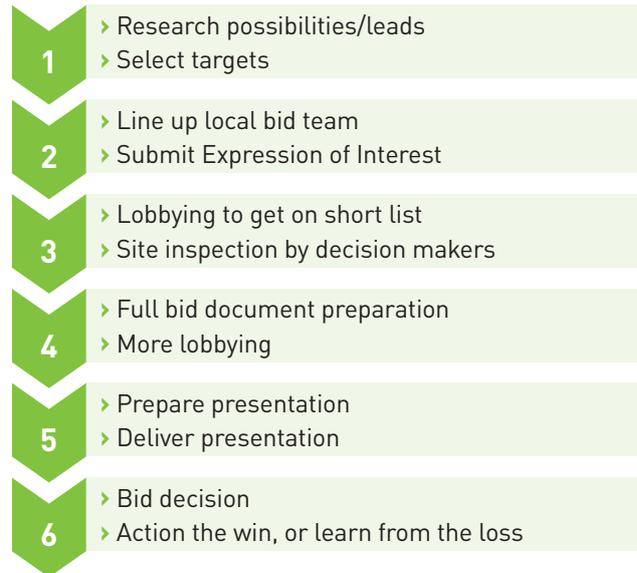
Basically, any sort of winnable business event which is up for grabs, but the major Bureaux tend to focus on:

- › Regional and NSW State conventions
- › National and international conventions
- › Local, State, national and international corporate meetings
- › National and international incentive travel programs
- › Regional, State, national and international exhibitions.



4.2 THE PROCESS

There is usually a two-stage process, with clients casting a wide net via an Expression of Interest which eventually is reduced to a short list for a full tender.



Again, the importance of research and maintenance of up-to-date databases is critical to the process.

Once potential targets are selected, this is overlaid with information relating to support from the local organisation (if any), likely Government support, timing and capacity factors, any historical knowledge of the event including its financial viability, the likely cost of bidding and return on investment, and the chances of winning.



4.3 SALES/BUSINESS LEADS

All your leads should be contained within your database, with the flexibility to search across a range of fields.

Potential business leads can come from:

- › Local contacts
- › From media reports on conventions being staged – local, state, national
- › Previous/current customers
- › Online RFPs received
- › Bought lists of contacts
- › Trade show contacts
- › Associations lists
- › PCOs (try Meetings and Events Australia (MEA) Who's Who online (insert website address) or become an MEA member or look at membership of PCOA)
- › Yellow pages for CTMs, NSW Associations/Societies
- › Government Departments (national/state/local)
- › PCO websites for lists of their events
- › Bureau websites showing any upcoming events with regional potential
- › Bureau press releases regarding business won
- › Ambassador Programs (see later).

Your leads must be constantly updated and include as much information as possible.

TIP!

Knowledge is power! Do your homework. Get inside the heads of clients – Google! What do they do? Pick up on any organisational focus/directions and how conference might fit into these. Remember – the bid must focus on them, not you! No cookie cutter proposals, personalise it. BE CAREFUL not to pad your proposals or RFPs with leisure-focused material which is not relevant to the brief.

NOTE RE: BIDDING

The detailed bidding process outlined below is usually for larger pieces of business.

*Most smaller conferences require responses to **Requests For Proposals (RFPs)**, many of which are price driven. These quotes provide an opportunity to provide personalised responses to move from price-driven business by creative approaches and value-added offers. (See 4.7 for more on RFPs and adding value).*

4.4 BID PREPARATION

There can be considerable research work necessary before the actual bid document is compiled.

4.4.1 Background information

- › Is there a formal bid/tender document?
- › Decision-making criteria?
- › Decision makers? Intermediaries?
- › What are the client objectives for the event?
- › Where has it been held previously? Good chance or slim chance that event will come to your region?
- › Your competitors? How do you stack up? Any unique advantages to give you an edge?
- › Logistical challenges?
- › Profile of participants? e.g. gender mix, average age, level of expectations
- › Any political, safety, other issues?
- › What's the timeline? Is it achievable?

Other:

- › Previous destinations and numbers
- › How often held? Annual, biennial?
- › Rotational factors? Is there a set pattern?
- › How long since in your region?
- › Minimum infrastructure needed?
- › When is decision being made and by whom?
- › Is the Accompanying Persons Program important (or no spouses/partners or children allowed)?
- › Local member or contact? How experienced and how well regarded are they within organisation?
- › Two-stage process? EOI and short list?
- › At what stage are site inspections held?
- › Lead time from decision to actual event?

4.4.2 Who is on Your Bid Team?

Usually, for important pieces of business, the destination forms a Taskforce or Bid Committee that is usually led by the local convention bureau and may include:

- › Local host organisation, if relevant (enthusiastic and committed)
- › Recommended venue/s
- › Supporting airline and/or other transport option
- › Local conference organiser/PCO (member of the Bureau if relevant)
- › Sometimes, the inbound operator/DMC (member of the Bureau if relevant)
- › Other specific suppliers identified in bid e.g. Security consultant, entertainment company
- › The local and/or Government tourism organisation or other relevant department/agency if relevant.

TIP!

Add a Google alert with your client's name so you can see any media mention of your client (or even the industry sector) to stay up-to-date with developments which may impact the client's decision-making.

4.4.3 Marketing/Lobbying

A bid may take many months, even years, to play out, from initial lead to expression of interest, to full bid and then strategic lobbying to win:

- › Determine your timeline
- › Prepare a detailed critical path for the bid project – do you have enough accommodation? Do you need to partner with another venue or town to win the business?
- › Know your target and its structure - who's influential and who are the decision makers – including political factors within association
- › Lobby decision makers carefully, taking care not to overstep protocols in regard to entertainment and gifts
- › Build relationships and trust by meeting deadlines, honouring contracts
- › Consider promotional appearances at key events (e.g. Previous conferences)
- › Consider unique and creative giveaways to promote your destination
- › Decide what promotional display materials, audio-visuals, flyers are needed
- › Design a communication strategy to boost delegate numbers if you win the event
- › Site inspections are very important: discuss and design the visit program to meet needs of client, not the suppliers' needs
- › Use your track record and testimonials of previous successful events.



4.5 THE BID DOCUMENT

Destination-based Bids could be submitted by regional convention bureaus, local councils, a regional tourism organisation, a locally-formed specific bid team or a potential host property with wider support.

Formal Bid Documents are more comprehensive than a response to a Request for Proposal (see below).

Before assembling the information for inclusion in your bid document, read the tender very carefully, highlighting all issues which need to be addressed such as:

- › Dates are agreed upon and space/accommodation tentatively booked
- › Capacity – minimum infrastructure requirements for meeting space and accommodation
- › Transport, including air access
- › Cost competitiveness
- › Local support and any funding
- › Local expertise
- › Partner Programs (Accompanying Persons Program i.e. tours/activities for them while the delegate is in meetings/sessions)
- › Pre and post conference touring options.

Consider who will be reading the document and their likely viewpoint. Look at past winning bids and examine why those bids were successful. Consider any ethnic, cultural, age or gender factors you may need to take into account. What experience they may have in this area of site selection – sophisticated event experience or new to the task.

Other considerations could be important, such as:

- › Security concerns
- › Broadband width for internet access and WiFi capacity
- › Special needs e.g. disabled access
- › Level of dietary requirements e.g. mainly kosher, vegetarian?
- › Environmental policies, sustainability initiatives of the venue
- › Any special occasion being celebrated by the potential client such as a corporate/association important anniversary
- › If the theme of the event has already been determined, there may be some obvious link between the theme and your destination. If not, a link might be suggested.

Ensure the document:

- › Looks professional, attractive, creative, clear
- › Includes letters of support from Mayor, key figures
- › Shows enthusiasm for the event
- › Avoids the off-the-shelf formulaic style which is obviously cut-and-paste
- › Addresses all issues of importance to the host organization
- › Suggests new ideas re program/sponsors
- › Is submitted before deadline
- › Has an electronic version with hyperlinks.

Make sure you have printed enough hard copies available (if requested) for distribution to all key decision-makers, plus extra for your files and members of your local team. Check the best form of distribution to reach the client before the deadline.

TIP!

Be prepared for a long process. Some bids are years in the making. In the major capitals, it is not unusual to bid for an international or national congress two to five years in advance. Company and Government meetings tend to be shorter lead time. Simple requests for proposals can be a matter of weeks out, with tight turnarounds. So make sure you have all the basic information at your fingertips.

Your presentation:

If you have the chance to present your destination's bid in person then don't forget to:

- › Rehearse, onsite if possible and test equipment
- › Pick your best presenters to deliver
- › Address the perceived negatives of your destination and how you might overcome them
- › Allow plenty of time for questions, consider likely ones and practice your responses
- › Ask the client/s if there are any items of concern or interest not covered in your bid document and the presentation, so you are leaving no stone unturned.

If you WIN . . .

- › Stay in regular touch with the host/organiser, following through and troubleshooting if necessary
- › Discuss promotional support to ensure maximum delegate numbers
- › Remember to secure testimonials and prospect of future business
- › Take prospective clients to showcase events in your venue/area
- › Write a case report for the file, share information with allies
- › Use the win as example to encourage other potential business.

**If you lose... Learn from the experience**

- › Ask the organisation for frank appraisal of your offer
- › Find out winning factors of successful destination
- › Congratulate the winners (they may help you when the event is next up for bid)
- › Enquire if any possibility of rebidding next time
- › Check to see if any possibility of hosting satellite meetings, pre and post with the winning destination
- › Write a case report for future reference.

Don't Forget

- › Success often requires patience
- › Bids may be tendered two or three times before a win
- › Check lead times for next time – larger ones often longer, but some can be very short
- › You can learn from every bid experience
- › Some destinations “bid to lose”, to learn for the next attempt!

Anniversaries can provide opportunities to strengthen your bid. For instance, the joint ANZAHPE/AMEA Medical Education Conference chose Newcastle in 2015 – one of the reasons given was to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the University of Newcastle.

TIP!

4.6 BID TEMPLATE FOR HOST REGIONAL DESTINATIONS

Your bid document needs to be attractive, easy to read, persuasive and inspire confidence, as well as having easy links to relevant sections. Invest in a professional design and photographs which can be adapted with relevant content for individual bids.

COVER	Cover using eye catching illustration or destination photo and including	ACCESS	Map showing air/road/rail connections and details about daily passenger capacity of airlines, rail, coaches, etc.			
	Client/event name		MEETING CAPACITY	Spreadsheet showing meeting capacities, breakouts, exhibition space, pre function areas. Include floor plans.		
	Date of proposed event			ACCOMMODATION	Spreadsheet showing available accommodation for all relevant properties, style of accommodation. If multiple venues are being suggested for accommodation and events, a local map may be helpful showing key locations.	
	Proposed destination/venue				UNIQUE GROUP ACTIVITIES	Opportunities for group activities, and individual pre and post options. Include photos.
	Date of bid					OFF-SITE LOCATIONS
INSIDE PAGE	Add any confidentiality/copyright clause regarding content of the bid	EVENT REQUIREMENTS	Any other key points which relate to the brief not included in other sections.			
	Author of bid, contact details etc		COSTINGS	Either firm prices or indicative costings for accommodation, meeting space, F&B alternatives etc.		
CONTENTS PAGE	List of contents and page numbers with hyperlinks if electronic version	LOCAL SUPPLIERS		Details of local expertise such as staging/themed events companies, exhibition hire companies, local transport, local entertainers and speakers.		
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	A succinct statement or paragraph or dot points on why your destination is the perfect choice. Aspirational and inspirational wording appropriate especially if pitching to a corporate incentive. Think about the wording which would appeal to the potential client reading this.		OTHER POINTS?	Environmental credentials. Safety and security issues.		
		LETTER OF INVITATION		From appropriate destination person such as CEO of local convention bureau; chair of Destination Network; local Mayor; GM of venue. Warmly invite the host organisation to the destination and offering strong support and commitment to making the event a success.	EVIDENCE OF CAPABILITY TO DELIVER	Testimonials, awards, case studies of other similar events held in the destination/property
2ND LETTER	Include if relevant, a second invitation/support letter from the local organising committee chair, or a local keynote figure relating to the event if appropriate. For example head of a local educational institution, health care organisation, tourism body, Chamber of Commerce.					
WHY YOUR DESTINATION:	Powerful words about your destination/property which highlights any unique appeal and any areas of specific relevance to the potential client e.g. health institutions, local centres of excellence.					



4.7 VENUE REQUESTS FOR PROPOSALS (RFPS)

Most regional destinations and venues are dealing on a daily basis with simple requests for proposal where capacity, availability and price are the major factors. Often it is hard to add value to these RFPs when the end client is not identified, so the supplier is unable to understand the nature of the business or the objectives of the meeting.

Many RFPs nowadays can be done online which means a venue can be flooded with automated RFPS taking time and resources to handle. Ideally, RFPs would be split into a two stage process making it more efficient for all concerned i.e.

- › Expression of Interest which determines availability, capacity, cost estimates and interest in hosting the event
- › Stage Two which responds in detail to the client’s brief.

However, venues have to play the hand they are dealt and cannot afford to miss out on potential business. So all RFPs are worthy of consideration, although some will self-eliminate on the basis of availability, capacity and cost.

The following information is general in nature and needs to be tailored to fit specific RFPs.

4.7.1 The Basics

DEADLINE	Basically, the advice is don’t miss it!
FLEXIBILITY WITH DATES	If client’s ability to move the date means more flexibility in terms of availability, price and negotiability, say so. Even if some clients indicate firm dates, there can be room for adjustments: perhaps even a day or two can make a difference. Highlight any problem dates such as school/ public holidays, conflicting bookings.
PARTNERSHIPS	Perhaps your property can’t handle the whole event, but you could join forces with a competitor down the road. Consider this, if the alternative is losing the business.
CARE WITH ACCURACY	If you are using standard templates, take care you have made all the necessary adjustments for the specific RFP. Nothing worse than mistakes which are obviously due to a sloppy cut and paste.
CONTACT PERSON	One person to handle the liaison from the property side is a big plus. Often that person will be the “Convention Services Manager” who sees the event through the whole project timeline.

CAPACITY CLAIMS	Ensure claims for capacity are not overstated.
FLOOR PLANS	Show different room set-ups and consider extra helpful information such as sight lines restrictions (pillars) ceiling heights, sound proofing, divisible rooms for smaller breakouts.
OTHER AREAS	Include details about pre-function space, potential additional exhibition or event space, flexible areas in the property which could be used. Availability of marquee hire for extra space.
BLOCK BOOKINGS	Advise the maximum number of accommodation rooms which can be allocated to any one piece of business (some properties retain a number of rooms for FITs, or other committed business). Can the whole property be booked out for exclusive use?
COSTS	In addition to the obvious accommodation costs, meeting space hire and F&B costs, be upfront about any “hidden” costs such as weekend loadings, additional security costs.
PAYMENT SCHEDULE	Be clear about deposit and payment requirements. Offer to provide a sample contract.
PREFERRED SUPPLIERS	Include any preferred supplier policies or restrictions e.g. audio-visual technicians/equipment.
OTHER VALUABLE INFORMATION	For example, loading docks, coach parking bays, any extra charges for bump in and bump out times, free conference secretariat office space.
INTERNET	Provide your Broadband/NBN strength and WiFi capabilities, plus any additional costs.
DESTINATION	Required information regarding your environs, access, relevant options.

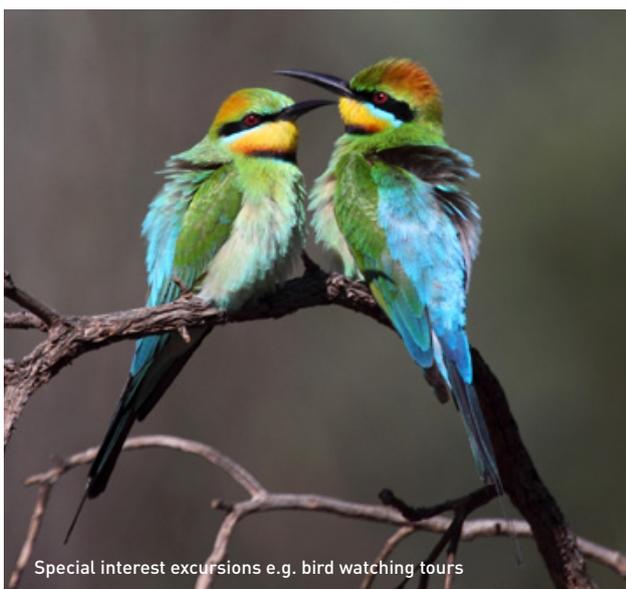
4.7.2 The Extras: Value-adding

You have covered the basics. Now you add the icing.

Consider what you might be able to add value to the offering, such as:

- › Offering a special rate to delegates who wish to extend their stay (pre or post)
- › A tempting offer which encourages the client to lock in a repeat business for the following year
- › Discounts for flexibility of dates which see movement to low season or midweek for example
- › Free local theming for welcome reception/gala dinner for instance
- › Exclusive use of the property, allowing free rein for use of all available space to encourage creative program design
- › Help with local publicity
- › Assistance in securing support from local transport/airline company
- › Free WiFi for delegates
- › Attractive free-of-charge (f.o.c.) Ratio for rooms and upgrades for VIPs
- › Free parking if applicable and would be considered a valuable add-on
- › Inclusion of breakfast in room rate for an attractive rate
- › Sponsoring local entertainer for opening or similar
- › Welcome baskets with local produce for VIPs
- › Off-site catering (woolshed/grand mansion/beach club)
- › Suggestions for off-site unique venues with which you could partner
- › Creative ideas for different meeting formats
- › On-site team building options
- › Fresh F&B ideas using local produce
- › Local talent entertainment/bands suggestions
- › Risk management plan
- › Gym or exercise options e.g. morning yoga sessions
- › Carbon reduction suggestions/environmental policy
- › Theme party ideas e.g. Beach Party, Rodeo, Roaring 20s etc
- › Partnerships with local experts e.g. Historical walking tours, indigenous culture programs, connections with authentic local experiences
- › Ideas for local sponsorship of the event
- › Case studies to demonstrate successful events hosted in the past.

The list is as long as your imagination and creativity. Research your client and see think about what might appeal to them.



4.8 BOOSTING YOUR CHANCES

4.8.1 Subvention

'Subvention' is a word commonly used in the business events industry. Basically it involves offering financial or in-kind support to help win the business. It may be out of the reach of many regional destinations, although it is worth considering even if the subvention is only minimal. It might make the difference between winning and losing. Usually a destination offering subvention at bid stage has a strong reason or multiple reasons for wanting to attract a specific business event. Perhaps the subject matter fits with the strategies of the local government or Chamber of Commerce, or perhaps the prestige of winning a specific event will provide a strong publicity platform for the region as well as attracting considerable economic benefits. It is up to the individual destinations to consider the likely return of investment of any subvention dollars or local sponsorship to strengthen their bid.

Subvention can take many forms. For example, subvention may be offered as a cash incentive, an underwriting of the event, a per-delegate subsidy, sponsorship of element of the event e.g. Welcome Cocktail Party, or financial sponsorship of a key speaker. Your local Mayor may offer a free or discounted Town Hall reception for the VIPs involved.

4.8.2 Community Outreach Ideas

With more organisations incorporating a corporate social responsibility (CSR) element into their business, this CSR aspect can infiltrate many areas including the staging of their business events.

Giving back to the local community in which they are meeting, or leaving a legacy of some sort, often appeals not only to the host organisation but also to the participants who wish to connect to the community rather than be a transient visitor.

The bid could include ideas for leaving a legacy in the destination. For instance, a donation to the local hospital, rescue service or a specific local cause. Perhaps something that provides a relevant connection to the business event: needed hospital equipment donated by a medical conference. A Pediatric dental conference in Central Australia held free sessions for local Aboriginal children to teach them more about dental care. When internationally renowned genetics experts came to Australia for a large congress on Genetics, they organised a free public lecture to update the community on the latest developments in this fascinating health science.

At The Snowy Region Visitors Centre there is a conservation program for the local endangered Corroboree frog which could dovetail beautifully into a group event at the Centre. In Port Macquarie, the unique Koala Hospital attracts both visitors and donations from conference groups.

4.8.3 "Green" Events

An increasing number of host organisations are keen to reduce the carbon footprint of their business events. Some organisations will ask for your green "credentials" to be included in your bid. Many venues already have environmental policies in place. Some destinations even promote themselves as sustainable green destinations as part of their branding. Even if not specifically requested in the bid document, it is worthwhile drawing the potential host's attention to any environmental practices adopted by the bidder. For instance, one major hotel property offers to offset the carbon emissions of any event held on its premises. Other venues boast about food recycling, worm farms, water re-usage, wind power for electricity and so on.

There is a host of material about "green" destinations and "green" meetings on the web. Google for more information, checklists, ideas, and certification.

4.8.4 Delegate Boosting

For many associations, attracting members and others to register for the event is crucial to its success and its budget. These organisations will be receptive to any ideas to boost interest in the destination and revenue from delegate registration fees. If you are a property, perhaps you could offer free accommodation for one delegate as a prize draw to encourage early registrations, or a free spa, or similar. Or perhaps make a value-added offer of breakfast or similar for the first xx number of delegates to book at your property. Perhaps there are other giveaways which could be offered at previous conferences where this particular event is being promoted. Think about what your property or destination could suggest to inspire delegates to register.

4.8.5 Professional and Creative Bids

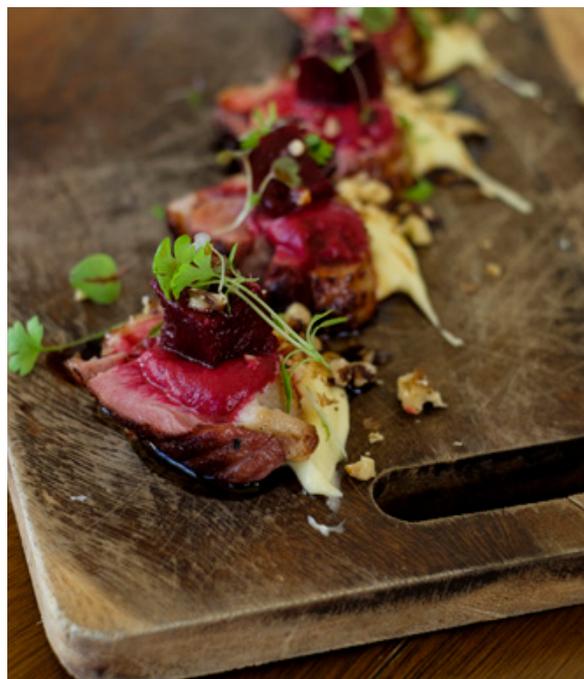
Bidding for business can be a highly competitive exercise so efforts made to produce a professional and creative bid can stand out. Depending on the complexity and importance of the bid, it may be worthwhile having your document professionally designed. While ensuring you have answered all the essential questions, go the extra distance with creative ideas for unique options in your destination. Use testimonials if appropriate, use quality, appropriate photos and cases studies to illustrate your points.

4.9 CHECKLIST

Have you reviewed your marketing plan for any gaps/ areas for improvement?

Do you have your competitive set defined?

- ✓ Have you benchmarked against your competitors?
- ✓ Do you have a target matrix of potential business?
- ✓ Have you got an environmental policy?
- ✓ Do you know your destination's USPs? Pristine air, clean water, unique attractions, Indigenous culture, history and heritage aspects?
- ✓ Have you developed an attractive bid proposal template?
- ✓ Do you have authentic and unique local activities?
- ✓ Have you established a strong local "business events" team if you don't have a local convention bureau?
- ✓ Have you got a risk management plan for events?
- ✓ Does your destination have an online conference or business events guide?
- ✓ Do you have professionally produced case studies with attractive photos/layout?
- ✓ Have you got testimonials to share from satisfied event clients?
- ✓ Do you have easily downloadable floor plans of your meeting space available online?
- ✓ Do you use local produce (e.g. honey, wine, meats, nuts, fruit) which could be promoted?
- ✓ Have you developed suggestions for community outreach programs?



TIP!

- › Have some great local examples which could be incorporate into a host organisation's CSR angle for their event. Think about local causes which are interesting to hear about and need support.
- › Have your green credentials at your fingertips. What is your company/venue/destination doing about recycling, reusing, reducing?
- › Offer creative delegate boosting ideas and support. Think about what you can do to boost interest and attendance for a win-win result.

5. THINKING OUTSIDE THE SQUARE

5.1 ANCHOR BUSINESS EVENTS

Most business events are secured by bids, RFPs or direct contact with the destination or specific venue.

Some destinations have taken a more entrepreneurial approach and developed their own unique, locally based new 'anchor' business events, leveraging their own expertise or centres of excellence. In this way they create an annual event/reason to visit and a revenue stream. This approach requires research, resources and nous. It often requires the right partners. Such events may be of a commercial nature. Joint ventures between a destination and a commercial operator may be needed to bring the idea to fruition. Commercial viability is important.

Four case studies illustrate the possibilities:

- ▶ Waste Conference, Coffs Harbour, now in its 20th year. An annual event held each year at Coffs Harbour, owned by Impact Environment, a Port Macquarie-based company, and run each year with local Coffs Harbour City Council support. [For more information go to meetinns.com.au/testimonials](http://meetinns.com.au/testimonials)
- ▶ Luminosity Youth Summit, annual event initiated and established in Port Macquarie with plans to make it a national event. [For more information go to meetinns.com.au/testimonials](http://meetinns.com.au/testimonials)
- ▶ Food for Thought Forum. In 2016 Tweed Shire Council initiated a forum of farmers, food processors, restaurateurs and other lovers of local food, to build collaboration and share opportunities in the emerging local food tourism, food production and producers' space. [For more information go to meetinns.com.au/testimonials](http://meetinns.com.au/testimonials)
- ▶ 19th Local Government Information Technology Conference 2016. Developed and owned by Coffs Harbour City Council, aimed at bringing together IT personnel working at local councils around Australia. [For more information go to meetinns.com.au/testimonials](http://meetinns.com.au/testimonials)

Your destination might consider gaps in the market and strengths of its region to determine if there is a business events which could be launched and anchored to your town/city.

You may have leaders in their field based within your region who would be willing to support the creation of a new anchor event. A strong Chamber of Commerce in addition to a supportive local Council could lend support and resources to developing the feasibility of such an event. Local media may provide additional support by way of endorsement, sponsorship and marketing.

5.2 FORMING A BUSINESS EVENTS COMMITTEE AND A LOCAL AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

If your destination is keen to develop as a business events destination, and it is has not advanced far enough down the path to have formed its own local convention bureau, interested parties may combine forces to form a voluntary working committee to present and promote a united team front. Perhaps your local Council could commit a staff member to take responsibility for acting as the coordinator for such a committee. To help identify leads and promote the destination, a small committed group of leading local business figures could form the basis of a small Ambassador Program. An Ambassador Program harnesses the power of third party advocacy and/or endorsement to encourage others to stage business events in your destination. For more information on convention ambassador programs, examples on a larger scale can be found on websites for Business Events Sydney, Adelaide Convention Bureau, Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Centre (Club Melbourne program) and Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre (Convention Advocates program).

Have you identified your destination's strengths and reputation in specific industry sectors? For example, agriculture areas, education, research centre, professional services?

TIP!



5.3 EXPANDING EXISTING EVENTS

Does your destination already mount successful business events on a local level which could be expanded to attract interstate or even international delegates through program expansion and additional marketing efforts? There may be local Agriculture Shows which could support relevant business meetings/conferences attached to the annual event. On a larger scale, consider what Destination NSW has achieved leveraging its annual public Vivid Sydney Festival to encourage organisations to stage relevant conferences and forums pre or post the Festival using the event as leverage.

5.4 LEVERAGING MAJOR INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES IN CAPITAL CITIES

Have you checked what international congresses are coming to Sydney, Brisbane, Canberra and Melbourne for which there are satellite meetings or field trip possibilities?

The following case studies provide examples of such activities:

- 5th Congress International Society for Applied Phycology (Sydney) 2014 – field trip to the South Coast to study seaweed and experience the South Coast environs. [For more information go to meetinnsw.com.au/testimonials](http://meetinnsw.com.au/testimonials)
- 9th International Wheat Conference (Sydney) - field trip to North West NSW regions. [For more information go to meetinnsw.com.au/testimonials](http://meetinnsw.com.au/testimonials)
- Amway Group 2016 – one day incentive trip ex Sydney to Hunter Valley regions. [For more information go to meetinnsw.com.au/testimonials](http://meetinnsw.com.au/testimonials)

Opportunities exist especially in the cases of NSW regions which can be accessed from a major city with a one-day program (Sydney, Canberra, Gold Coast). Interesting one-day packages from these regions which offer authentic experiences not only provide one-day tours for accompany persons, but tailored packaging can also attract conference delegates as part of the official conference program.



6. RUNNING SUCCESSFUL SITE VISITS/ FAMILIARISATION PROGRAMS

Familiarisation programs, also known colloquially as “familis” or educational programs, can reap big dividends if they are professionally planned and delivered. Badly organised trips can have a negative impact which stays in the mind long after the famil is over. Since considerable resources are involved in organising familis, ensure sufficient time is spent organising relevant, professional famil programs.

Understand the difference between a famil and a site visit. Business events familis usually target a group of potential clients or intermediaries who may possibly use your destination in the future. Site visits take place once a specific client has a piece of business and is seriously considering your destination, usually on the short list, and needs to follow-up on various matters on site. After the business is secured there is often at least one more site visit to address operational matters.

Familis are a powerful and essential part of any business events marketing strategy. Nothing bonds buyer and supplier quite like a positive experience of the destination. Relationships are formed, ideas are ignited, leads are developed and deals can be sealed.

But in a time-starved world, the effort needs to be worth it for everyone. Substantial costs are involved in terms of time, human resources, travel, accommodation and entertainment. Organisers may love being feted on fabulous familis, but most simply don't have the time to accept all offers and sometimes your best targets are often the hardest to secure.

However, organisers owe it to their clients to stay in touch with the market so they need to experience destinations. However, they need a solid business case for taking time from income-producing activities to commit to a famil which may mean several days out of their office.

The best familis involve a team effort from the destination rather than just one property. The program is designed to show the destination's professionalism, creativity, unique aspects, and capabilities. A business events famil is not the same as a leisure group famil and should not be treated as such. It's not a vacation, a reward for an overworked organiser, or a party. However it can be an eye-opening, stimulating and memorable experience for all concerned.

Some clever destinations incorporate visits to local industries, institutions or the like which have relevance to the participants. Matching local representatives to their

peers in the same fields and inviting them to some of the events within the famil can create valuable relationships and ideas for the potential clients. Develop a serious program for your famil which is more than just multiple site visits to venues and the usual F&B events. Don't be afraid to organise a meeting session where participants can talk about trends, share ideas and concerns. It will be a learning experience for all concerned. Consider engaging a professional moderator or “host” to help develop and facilitate the program. A program with depth and clout at the outset will help spark the interest of serious potential clients. Perhaps you could invite a previous event organiser to provide a successful case study which instills confidence in the group of your destination's capabilities.

Showcase local talent and VIPs wherever you can. Could the local Mayor meet your group at the welcome reception? Maybe you have a wonderful local speaker or entertainer who can be incorporated into the program. Don't be afraid to spice up your program with something different (something which could be used during a future event). For instance, a historical walking tour of the town with a guide, or unusual off-site venues that can hold larger groups.

Research each famil participant beforehand and provide a brief on each one to your main famil team who will be interfacing with them.

Wherever you can, use local produce and brag about it. Think about speaker gift ideas that are unique to your destination which you could suggest (or giveaway) to your targets.

Feel you are too small a destination to warrant the time commitment from key targets? Perhaps you can team up with another nearby destination to broaden the appeal of the program, and help defray costs.

Think about including the trade media in your famil to gain some publicity for your destination and/or your famil. Some destinations have become known for their annual famil programs which are covered in the trade media and arouse interest for the following year. It can be more effective to hold one talked-about annual famil to your destination which is carefully planned over 12 months than trying to do a number of basic ones on a sporadic basis. Often timing will depend on your target market, seasonality and availability of sponsored hotel rooms, meals, travel and so on. Be aware that some companies have famil policies for their staff.

MORE TIPS FOR THE HOST DESTINATION OR PROPERTY

1. RESEARCH AND RELEVANCE

Make sure there is a real possibility of business from the invitees. Carefully check credentials to qualify the prospects. Find out what they are interested in and design a tailored program which reflects this.

2. SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

Keep your group small and manageable – ideally no more than twelve, so you can easily provide personal attention to all the individuals.

3. COMPATIBILITY

Ideally, don't mix association conference organisers with corporate incentive planners. Their needs are different. Match your group in terms of seniority and type. Take care that juniors are not sent at last minute to replace CEOs. Personalise the invitation. Make it clear if invitation is non-transferable.

4. CREATIVITY

Add a big dose of creativity to the program, although save some surprises for onsite. Over-deliver on what you have promised. Inject one big memorable hit to impress.

5. CLARITY

Ensure the invitees are clearly aware of what is included in the famil, especially class of air travel: for example, if confirmed economy with up-grades requested but not guaranteed. Provide practical information on dress codes, weather and local tips as part of the pre-trip information pack.

6. SPECIAL SESSIONS

Allow time for facilitated discussions to maximise feedback to you, as well as stimulating ideas between the group and building camaraderie. A major benefit of famils to the buyers is often the valuable networking opportunity. Maximise this by adding time on program for focus group discussions.

7. LEAVE SPACE

Overcrowding the program is a common mistake. Give the hosted guests time to catch their breath, allowing them space to experience the destination in their own way. Nothing is more counterproductive than a weary famil guest who is on the run from dawn until midnight while all the destination suppliers all press for their chance to overwhelm them with activity.

8. WARTS AND ALL

Don't dwell on the negatives, but be honest about your destination's capabilities and possible drawbacks which will add to your credibility and help build an open relationship with your potential clients.

9. NOT ANOTHER HOTEL ROOM!

Avoid hours of tramping around empty hotel meeting rooms and bedrooms. Think of ways to present the property which is memorable. Less can be more.

10. BEST STAFF AND ESCORTS

Allocate your best team communicators to look after the famil guests. The right person on the tour bus, at the property, hosting a dinner, can make all the difference. Don't leave it to inexperienced staff. Good hosts can immediately sense problems and nip them in the bud. They can also charm the group, leaving an impression of professionalism, warmth and confidence. Ideally, allocate one senior person to escort the group from start to finish. Ensure senior destination representatives pay their respects to the group.

Brief all your staff on the day to ensure they are aware of the incoming famil: casual contact with other staff members can leave a positive lasting impression. Ask your General Manager to welcome the group.

11. ENCOURAGE INDIVIDUAL REPORTING

Provide a simple famil folder for the buyer to record impressions and keep business cards. Don't overload with heavy handouts or unwieldy gifts which will more than likely be left in the hotel room. You can always mail materials as a post visit follow up.

12. CREATE A CHALLENGE

Think of a fun competition which will help focus the minds of the buyers on the destination – with a worthy prize.

13. KEEP TO TIME

Your guests will be frustrated if the program is constantly running behind schedule because the hosts have not been realistic with the timing. Business people plan their times around the program breaks to call the office, handle emails, or catch up with important matters. All too often these breaks disappear due to poor time management.

14. DE-BRIEF

Seek honest appraisals from the individuals after the famil, possibly through a survey. Use constructive criticisms to improve the product.

7. MEASURING YOUR SUCCESS

7.1 RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Clients are increasingly looking to measure the return on investment (ROI) from their events. They are setting measurable objectives prior to the event and adopting methodologies to check results.

Smart suppliers in the business events industry are also measuring their results to determine their own return on investments from specific pieces of business, and consider how that yield might have been maximised more effectively through different strategies.

For example, conference venues are determining the yield of business events through measurement of revenue and uptake of other services they are offering. Convention bureaux all need to measure their successes in terms of bids won, membership levels, sponsorship revenue and elevating profile and positioning (see later). These results can be critical in underpinning calls for future funding.

The most important first step is to establish at the outset your ROI objectives and the measurement methods at the outset.

For example:

- › Number of bid proposals/wins ratio
- › Number of room nights from conferences
- › Delegate spend and satisfaction through individual surveys
- › Total number of delegates (and % over breakeven target)
- › Host satisfaction survey (and de-briefing)
- › Other “intangibles” for local industry/community eg CSR, encouraging investment
- › Media coverage
- › Repeat business.

7.2 EVALUATION AND DEBRIEFS

The information gained from post-conference surveys and de-briefings can provide valuable case studies and testimonials to attract future business and build a case for future funding. On-site de-briefings while the clients are still in-situ are recommended if possible, to gain immediate feedback while your destination is still top of mind. De-briefing staff can be a valuable training exercise for everyone to learn from the case study. Keep good records of past events. Professional photography of your events can also provide a quality resource for future reference.

7.3 ECONOMIC IMPACT

The most common method of determining the economic impact of a business event in a destination is done by way of a delegate expenditure survey.

Surveys of delegates require the co-operation of the host organisation, generally with the agreement to share the results. Destination NSW has developed a standardised convention delegate for regional conferences.

Business Events Sydney also have produced a free Research study Estimating Inscope Expenditure attributed to Business Events held in NSW. For further information: Business Events Sydney website businesseventssydney.com.au



7.4 “BEYOND TOURISM” BENEFITS

Lobbying for support for the business events industry has increasingly focused on the benefits from business events other than the traditional measurements of tourism spend. These may be referred to as “intangibles” or “indirect benefits” as well as “non-tourism” ROI.

Efforts are being made to identify business outcomes that are of benefit to the host organisation and the destination. These can relate to such areas as:

- › sales leads or business written by participants as a result of the trade show or conference
- › trade investments (include export deals)
- › community outreach programs
- › raising knowledge or developing skills of local professionals
- › other legacies for the local community such as increase investment, lifting profile in specific sectors, enhanced reputation.

For further information on this aspect, refer to reports published by The Business Events Council of Australia, and studies done by Business Events Sydney in association with the University of Technology. BES/UTS Beyond Tourism Benefits

7.5 CASE STUDIES

Destination NSW has compiled a series of case studies which showcase successful business events held around Regional NSW. Developing your own case studies not only provides a perfect publicity platform to promote your destination, it also provides positive examples for use with potential clients, and records the benefits of hosting business events at your property or within your destination.

For more information go to meetinnsw.com.au/testimonials



8. LIFTING YOUR PROFESSIONALISM AND PROFILE

Professional marketing and events operations people with skills in the business events industry lift a destination's reputation.

Upskilling helps build your personal reputation and brand. Individual accreditation in the conference industry boosts standing and promotes confidence. Entering Awards Programs focuses attention on recording results.

Winning is an obvious plus! Developing your own industry network and media database delivers its own rewards.

Stay up-to-date by scanning the various trade press newsletters and publications.



8.1 MAJOR AUSTRALIAN INDUSTRY ORGANISATIONS RELEVANT TO BUSINESS EVENTS

Meetings & Events Australia (MEA)*	meetingsevents.com.au
Professional Conference Organisations Australia (PCOA)	pco.asn.au
Association of Corporate Travel Executives (ACTE)	acte.org
Exhibition and Event Association Australasia (EEAA)	eeaa.com.au
Association of Australian Convention Bureaux (AACB)	aacb.org.au

**Meetings & Events Australia is Australia's oldest membership-based business events association. It offers a wide range of member programs covering accreditation, awards, continuing education. MEA has endorsed this Toolkit. Further information on MEA can be found in Section 9.*

Peak national body advocacy group: Business Events Council of Australia (BECA) businesseventscouncil.org.au

8.2 INDUSTRY AWARDS (WITH AWARD CATEGORIES RELATING TO BUSINESS EVENTS MARKET):

Meetings & Events Australia Awards	meetingsevents.com.au
Australian Event Awards	eventawards.com.au
AFTA National Travel Industry Awards (Business Events category)	afta.com.au/events/ntia
NSW Tourism Awards (Business Event Venue category)	nswtourismawards.com/Home



8.3 BUSINESS EVENTS TRADE SHOWS & CONFERENCES

Associations Forum & Exhibition (July, annual)	associations.net.au
Executive Assistants Network (EAN) Conference & Exhibition Series	executiveassistant.com
AIME, Melbourne (February, annual)	www.aime.com.au

8.4 AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS EVENTS TRADE MEDIA

Information sources: Local trade magazines and newsletters

CIM (monthly and enews)	cimmagazine.com
MICE.net (bi monthly and enews)	mice.net.au
SPICE News	spicenews.com.au
Associations Journal	associations.net.au/news/associations-journal
Business Events News (BEN) enews	businesseventsnews.com.au
Executive PA Magazine	executivepa.com.au
MICE BTN Magazine	impactpub.com.au/micebtn

Information sources: Global trade magazines and newsletters

M&C Asia Pacific	meetings-conventions-asia.com
Business Events Asia	bizeventsasia.com
CEI Asia	cei.asia
TTG MICE	ttgmice.com
International Meetings Review enews	internationalmeetingsreview.com
Meetings Net	meetingsnet.com
Meetpie	meetpie.com

TIP!

Successful operators in the business events space have a strong network of contacts within the industry and tend to have a high profile which has been gained through networking and reputation. Reputation is developed through delivery performance and profiling within the trade media, speaking engagements, and industry involvement. Networks are gradually built up over time boosted by volunteering on industry committees, speaking at industry events, profiling on LinkedIn, networking at trade shows and so on. While it can be difficult for regional industry members to participate to the same extent as their colleagues in the major capitals, think about opportunities which may exist. For instance, keep an eye out for industry functions which dovetail into your city visits, join electronic working committees, participate in webinars, and immerse yourself into networking events at trade shows and conferences.

9. MEETINGS & EVENTS AUSTRALIA

OVERVIEW OF THE INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

Meetings & Events Australia (MEA) recognises the value of regional business events and has been working with Destination NSW to develop strategies and programs that would assist regional operators to engage with MEA as a resource.

Meetings and Events Australia (MEA) was established in 1975 and is the peak body representing the events industry in Australia.

MEA represents companies and individuals that stage, produce, manages, supports and supplies to the thousands of events across Australia each year. These events are conferences, meetings, exhibitions, product launches, seminars, special events and much more.

Meetings and Events Australia offers professional development and educational programs, accreditation and recognition. It provides a forum for members to discuss current issues to improve the delivery of events.

MEA's mission is to:

- ▶ Promote the growth and excellence in the meetings and events sector
- ▶ Create business opportunities and facilitate business to business relationships
- ▶ Encourage better business practices
- ▶ Offer professional development and education to build a skilled and informed industry workforce
- ▶ Develop and manage an accreditation program to enhance the reputation of the industry and increase consumer confidence when dealing with industry professionals
- ▶ To expand the meetings and events market by promoting its value
- ▶ Advocate on behalf of the industry to raise its profile with Government.

More information on MEA can be found below and on the association's website: www.meetingsevents.com.au

REGIONAL MEMBERSHIP

MEA has introduced a Regional Membership category to recognise venues and operators and individual who work in regional NSW in business events and events. This new category will enable regional operators to have access to all of the services and programs that MEA offers including education, networking as outlined in this document.

The MEA Regional membership is an annual subscription fees (as at June 2017) are as follows:

Regional company membership: \$400 plus \$50 joining fee

Regional individual membership: \$100 plus \$50 joining fee

* Regional Australia refers to the non-metropolitan areas of the nation that are located beyond the major capital cities, their greater surrounding suburbs and any major centres that have a population in excess of 500,000 people.

Business Promotion

MEA company members receive a complimentary listing in the MEA Who's Who business directory. The directory is the premier events industry resource providing a one-stop shop for event requirements covering suppliers of products and services from all sectors of the industry.

MEA regularly conducts networking events around the country bringing together members from various sectors of the industry. These events are usually held in new or refurbished venues for members to be able to experience these facilities.

Sponsoring a MEA event or program is an opportunity for members looking to gain exposure and increase their profile to the industry.





Management & Development of Staff

MEA's education and training arm, the Australian Events Academy, conducts accredited and non-accredited qualification courses as well as seminars and workshops on specific topics. All seminars, workshops and courses are developed specifically for the meetings and events industry and delivered by experienced trainers with the aid of industry professionals.

MEA also co-ordinates mentoring programs to bring together employees of members wishing to develop their careers with experienced industry practitioners who can provide guidance and often a different perspective to the challenges facing those building a career within the industry.

Recognition of Businesses and Individuals

The Accredited Meetings Manager (AMM) and Accredited Inhouse Meetings Manager (AIMM) programs are the most recognised meetings and events industry accreditation programs in Australia, with accredited members recognised as being the leaders in their field.

The MEA Recognition program is open to all MEA members across all sectors of the industry and endorses members who have demonstrated their commitment to the industry and having reached a level of professionalism and expertise.

RESEARCH

MEA is eager to contribute and to commission research that will provide a better insight into the industry that will assist in the future planning.

In March 2017 MEA coordinated a survey to identify the existences of skills shortages in the industry. MEA partnered with two industry organisations to ensure that views from all sectors of the events industry were represented. The survey was designed to highlight perceived gaps in experience and skills so that training packages can be developed to help the industry appropriately, address shortfalls. This is the first research of this kind that has been carried out by the events industry. A full report on the outcomes of this research will be available in May.

MEA has also partnered with Executive PA on research into the purchasing patterns and requirements of these important buyers that mostly goes under the radar. Almost 75% of events delivered in Australia are corporate events that are often organised by personal assistants. This will be valuable research into this sector of the management of corporate events and included questions on regional conferencing.

MEA has plans for more research into the markets to better inform the industry.



9. MEETINGS & EVENTS AUSTRALIA (CONT'D)

EDUCATION

MEA works with its partners to strengthen the industry, support and educate today's decision makers to prepare the next generation for the future of our Industry.

MEA's education arm, the Australian Event Academy (AEA), is the industry's Registered Training Organisation that delivers a number of courses including a Diploma of Event Management, Masterclasses in event management. In late 2017 the Academy will be introducing online education that will be available for students right across Australia that will give access to all in remote areas of the country.

MEA's education is presented by experience trainers and often includes case studies and guest speakers from the industry.

There are plans to develop the professional development program to include other courses that are relevant to other sectors within the industry. The Academy will also work with organisations to develop bespoke training programs to suit their individual requirements.

In addition to the activities of the Australian Event Academy, MEA conducts professional development sessions across Australia that are attended by an estimated 4,000 industry professionals investing in their skills development.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

The MEA Annual Conference is a key event in the industry calendar and is the ultimate conference for the events sector. The program focuses on trends in the industry nationally and internationally and keeps members abreast of changes in the sector and provides a forum to network, engaged ideas and build relationships. This event is attended by 400-500 delegates from around Australia and includes a trade exhibition and the Gala Awards Dinner.

MEA AWARDS

The MEA Awards have been operating for more than 30 years, recognising and rewarding the successes of the events industry.

MEA is looking at introducing a category for Regional events to acknowledge the excellence of events being held outside metropolitan areas. The new MEA Awards program will be launched later in 2017.

ACCREDITATION AND RECOGNITION

MEA has offered an industry Accreditation and Recognition programs since the mid 1990's and is currently being reviewed to ensure that the industry benchmarks represents a high level of expertise and experience required in the events industry.

The objective of the programs is as follows:

- ▶ To ensure that the industry remains focused on raising the standards of its practice
- ▶ To enhance the reputation of the industry and increase consumer confidence when dealing with industry professionals
- ▶ To enforce the Industry's Code of Ethics
- ▶ To better inform the marketplace by differentiating individuals on the basis of a pre-determined criteria which has been agreed by the sector
- ▶ To reinforce the value of the industry as one that is professional with sufficient maturity to self-regulate.

A robust accreditation program will provide clients and the industry with the assurance that they are working with a qualified and experienced event professional who is committed to delivering successful events for their clients or organisations and who strive for continued improvement in the delivery of their services.

MEA is also scoping Company Accreditation which will be introduced for the first time in late 2017.





MENTORING PROGRAM

Over the past eight years, MEA has conducted this program to grow the leadership skills in the Australian events industry. One of the major challenges in our industry is the difficulty in attracting, recruiting and retaining skilled professionals to work in the sector. MEA has identified that a Mentor Program is a key initiative to encourage Mentees to fine-tune their skills, guide them to develop their career paths and leadership aspirations. It also provides an opportunity for Mentors to give back to the industry and leave a legacy.

The goal of the program is to up-skill industry professionals to improve the industry's overall competitiveness on the domestic and international stage. The program offers Mentees the opportunity to connect with an experienced 'matched' industry representative to discuss their career and future.

Our long term vision is to build on the success and develop programs for each of the state and territory branches for the benefit of the whole membership.

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

MEA is firmly committed to fostering the growth of young professionals in the events industry globally. One of the ways they provide for this is through the Young Professionals Scholarship Award.

The Young Professional Scholarship is for young professionals working in the Meetings & Events Industry in all states and territories of Australia providing the opportunity to attend the MEA Annual National Conference.



NETWORKING

One of the key reasons why industry associations exist is to provide a forum for professions and industry to meet, engage and learn from each other. It is a very important aspect to membership.

MEA offers opportunities for the meeting and events sector to network at all levels through its Club MEA, Young MEA and the recently launched MEA Leaders' series of events.

Networking events are held across Australia. These events allow MEA to build a community that supports the industry, nurture new entrants and encourage engagement, exchanging of ideas that will promote the industry and keep it evolving and vibrant.

WHO'S WHO DIRECTORY

As a member of MEA your organisation will be listed in the online Who's Who Directory along with all the details of your event product or service.

This Directory is accessed regularly by event and conference organisers from around Australia. There are plans for expand this facility to promote internationally. This would give your organisation exposure to relevant buyers and raise your profile in the events industry.





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