

Congress Ambassador Programmes



Everything ICCA members need to know about using local champions to build success in the international association meetings sector.



Table of content

1.	Introduction to Ambassador Programmes	4
2.	Value of Ambassador Programmes	6
3.	Strategic considerations	8
4.	Who to select as Ambassador?	11
5.	Key components in an Ambassador Programme	13
6.	Practical support for Ambassadors	17
7.	Stages in the bidding & event hosting process	19
8.	Ambassador "exit strategies"	21
9.	Challenges & threats to Ambassador Programmes	23
10.	ICCA & Ambassador Programmes	25
11.	Examples of ICCA member Ambassador Programmes	26

1. Introduction to Ambassador Programmes



Definition: An “Ambassador” in the context of the meetings industry is “a person of knowledge and stature, influential in their field, who can act as a representative of a destination and is prepared to work with local meetings professionals to secure conference business for that destination.

Definition: An “Ambassador Programme” is “a planned set of activities, tools and support services designed by local meetings professionals to assist Ambassadors to attract meetings to a city or country, and to assist those Ambassadors to create a legacy benefit for the destination and/or the local hosts of the meetings”.

Definition: A “Client Advisory Board” (CAB) is not the same thing as an Ambassador Programme. A CAB is essentially a group of existing clients, some of whom may be Ambassadors, who meet on regular occasions to provide advice to the destination and local suppliers on conditions in the market and ways that their destination’s marketing, products and services can be improved. This document doesn’t cover the details of setting up and running a CAB, but it should be noted that this function is complementary to a well-run Ambassador Programme.

The primary rationale for setting up an Ambassador Programme is that the majority of regularly-occurring international association meetings which rotate between countries require some kind of competitive bidding process which involves local or national contacts to put forward proposals or invitations, and to carry out this function either as individuals, as part of an informal bidding group, or as part of a formal chapter or other national sub-group of the association.

Whilst the rules, processes, and decision-making criteria will differ from association to association, and the relative power and influence of local association contacts will similarly vary, it is almost always the case that the input from these locals will have some significant impact on the decision about where an international meeting should take place. At the very least, the non-existence of any degree of local support will frequently cause a destination to be not considered as a viable candidate.



It should be noted that there will be some occasions where there is no formal involvement or even informal support needed from local association members, and in these instances Ambassador Programmes don’t play a role in the bidding process.

Large numbers of cities around the world, and smaller numbers of national destination marketing organisations and congress centres have taken the view that they should try to proactively manage the local input into the bidding process by setting up an Ambassador Programme. These programmes have typically been set up within the last decade, have developed to suit local financial, political and economic conditions, and now cover a broad range of different models. Some may involve intensive relationships with just 20 or 30 Ambassadors, others require a dedicated team managing relationships and activity programmes with over 1,000 contacts via a sophisticated database.

This publication is designed to draw ICCA members’ attention to the fundamental principles that underlie the most successful versions of these schemes, and to highlight the range of options that can be incorporated into the different models. It can be used as a reference guide when setting up a new programme from scratch or for planning the future evolution of an existing programme, or for identifying practical ideas for small-scale improvement.

For it to be fully effective, it is vitally important that any Ambassador Programme is designed as an

integrated element of a destination or venue's strategic plan for attracting international association meetings, rather than as a stand-alone project. The other research, sales and marketing activities aimed at this market sector should complement the Ambassador Programme and not work in isolation, since there are many different factors and sales-related activities that determine bidding success, and many other decision-making and decision-influencing individuals to target.

A well-planned programme not only helps to win a larger share of international association meetings, it can also play a key role in bringing together meetings industry and destination marketing professionals, local politicians, and local business, professional and academic leaders to create a shared strategic vision for the future development of their destination.

Whilst some destinations use Ambassadors to attract corporate and inter-governmental meetings, this is very rare. Ambassadors are frequently used in campaigns to attract world or regional sporting tournaments or cultural events, but this process works differently from Ambassador Programmes aimed at association meetings.

This publication will concentrate solely on this more commonly occurring role within the international association meetings sector.



2. Value of Ambassador Programmes

These programmes can be very time-consuming and require long-term allocation of resources, so it is important to understand all elements of the potential return on investment that they can help to deliver. Here is a summary of benefits:



Contest a higher volume of bids

An active programme enables a destination to be aware far earlier in the bidding process that they are a potential candidate, and to miss fewer potential bidding opportunities. The Ambassadors act as an extended "early-warning system", since they are primed to be aware of Open years and the announcement of requests to bid. This builds a "pipeline" of prospective bid targets, ensuring that the destination can generate a constant stream of bids-in-progress.

Win a higher proportion of bids



Destinations and venues which work closely with Ambassadors are usually more successful in their bids, since their approach can consistently combine professional support with internal knowledge of association-specific objectives, and their Ambassadors can feed them information about the likelihood of a successful bid, enabling them to put the most time and money into those campaigns with the greatest likelihood of success.

Reduce "no-hoper" bids and wasted marketing spend

Ambassador input is invaluable in working out the best time to bid, and the competitions where there is little or no hope of success that ought to be avoided. The top destinations rarely expend effort in bidding for unlikely candidate events, in part because of the feedback and advice they obtain from their Ambassadors. Not allocating resources to unproductive activities is at least as important as spending money on productive ones.

Build political support for the activities of meetings professionals

Meetings professionals often find it difficult to obtain adequate support and understanding for their work in bringing meetings to a destination, especially if their rationale is simply based on delegate expenditure and the implied number of jobs directly created or supported. An Ambassador Programme can elevate the discussion with local politicians, so that meetings professionals can clearly demonstrate the link between their work and economic development, science, healthcare and education policies, and other politically important areas. This creates a meaningful forum where politicians can interact with the Ambassadors, who then play a role as civic leaders.

Improve the professionalism of the events which the destination hosts.

Because Ambassadors are working in close partnership with meetings professionals from an early stage in the planning process, it is far easier to ensure financial, marketing and operational plans are viable and well executed.

Create great PR opportunities

Good news stories are often in short supply: focusing on the Ambassadors who have won business enables local media to tell positive stories with local heroes. This often generates far greater PR coverage than press releases that talk about the wins generated by a local convention bureau. These positive stories in turn help to generate further interest from other potential Ambassadors.

Contribute towards civic pride in a destination

Public, formal recognition of the success of Ambassadors in winning events for the destination is one of the simplest ways to generate civic pride. Business leaders can be encouraged to not just take pride in leading their companies, but in being a significant player in local civil society, and the Ambassador Programme then becomes a useful platform for them to interact in a structured way with political leaders.

Low cost/high return strategy

The costs of running an Ambassador Programme are usually far less than the more "glamorous" elements in a destination's marketing programme such as overseas trade shows and sales missions. At a time when overseas travel and expenditure by convention bureaux are under scrutiny in many countries, this "home-based" activity can be portrayed as efficient and cost-effective.

Align meetings priorities to the destination's economic, educational and social priorities

The natural Ambassadors for a destination, typically leaders within their international peer groups, will frequently be involved in fields which are strategically important for that destination. For example, a neurosurgeon who is prominent within his or her professional association is unlikely to be part of a weak neurosurgery unit in the destination hospital. And it is highly likely that part of the strategic medical strategy for the destination will be to further strengthen the areas of local expertise. A well-structured Ambassador programme therefore brings local strengths into clear alignment with the international congresses which are "natural" fits for that destination.



3. Strategic considerations

There are numerous strategic approaches to take when setting the structure, objectives, scope, and operating procedures of an Ambassador Programme. A great deal depends on the local political/economic situation (including key areas of expertise or strength) in the destination, the strength and budgets of the local convention bureau or major venue, existing civic networking, institutional relationships and levels of political engagement with the meetings industry. This section sets out some of the key strategic approaches and issues to consider.



Long-term commitment

International association meetings have the longest decision-making and advance booking timelines of any market segment, with periods of six to ten years between first identification of a target conference and the arrival of that event in the destination being very commonplace. A similarly long-term commitment for the operation of an Ambassador Programme is therefore essential for it to be successful. Short-term promotional activities with Ambassadors within the context of this long-term commitment are of course possible (eg to take advantage of a major anniversary of a local university or medical institution to boost Ambassador activity).

Alignment of objectives

Any strategic approach should aim to understand and incorporate the motivations and objectives of both the local institutions and the individual Ambassadors. Ideally there should also be alignment with the objectives of national or city political stakeholders. For example, a university may be primarily interested in increasing awareness of their research leadership in a particular academic subject, with the objective of attracting inward investment from government and/or venture capitalists – their support for a congress which helps to advance this agenda will be far greater than for an event which doesn't achieve this, even if a local academic is willing to bid. Similarly, finding out from individual Ambassadors about their goals will help to motivate them to bid: often there is an agenda related to investment, education of the next generation of practitioners in their field, or leaving some kind of personal legacy to commemorate their professional contribution to their field.



Focus on institutional relationships

Most programmes take the individual approach, dealing with prominent local doctors, scientists, academics and business leaders who have been identified as having links with potential target international association events. Destinations particularly target individuals who sit on decision-making boards or committees, who hold top elected positions, or who are in some other way well-known and respected within international associations. Another common approach is to identify “future leaders” just below the level of formal elected positions, who are frequently active and ambitious within the associations they belong to, and for whom winning a congress bid can be a key step towards achieving their personal goals within that association.



Focus on individual Ambassadors

Some destinations design their Ambassador Programmes around a series of strategic relationships with local institutions, such as universities, teaching hospitals, chambers of commerce, etc. The leaders of these institutions are brought into the programme as key stakeholders, perhaps being given formal leadership positions, and act as primary communication channels and “cheerleaders” to the individual Ambassadors.

Individual Ambassadors can be used as very effective conduits into the top levels of academic bureaucracies, government departments, and other institutions, and can help to communicate the institutional benefits that would be derived from collaborating on this type of programme.

Single-tier versus double-tier strategy

Some destinations concentrate their programme on a relatively small core group of top-level Ambassadors, often those who have assisted in winning multiple past events for the destination, whose job is not just to directly assist in winning specific events, but more importantly to encourage other leaders in their spheres of influence to bid for events, who themselves only join the formal Ambassador Programme once they are actively engaged in a bid, and then leave after the bid. This approach reduces the need for managing a large number of Ambassadors who are not actively bidding, but requires that the primary Ambassadors play a far more proactive role requiring intensive back-up support and monitoring to ensure that new prospective bidders are being properly recruited and motivated.

Different roles of national and city Ambassador Programmes

Where national tourist boards or convention bureaux develop nationwide Ambassador Programmes, there needs to be careful consideration given to the role of city-level programmes, and vice-versa, to avoid duplication and to ensure that the programmes reinforce each other especially in the area of research. Key issues become who handles communication, who gets actively involved in bid support, who “owns” the Ambassador, etc. Clearly written roles, formal letters of agreement or collaboration, and regular communication are critical to avoid confusion, especially in the minds of the Ambassadors. National programmes are far less common than city-level ones, but where they exist they can add a valuable “national pride” level of engagement for the Ambassador in addition to the civic pride engagement at city level, and can bring in the involvement of national politicians and government departments, which can add valuable elements to invitations to international organisations.



Ambassador Programmes as part of strategic economic development strategy

An Ambassador Programme has the capacity to bring the meetings marketing effort into a wider economic development strategy. Some destinations have specifically set up their programmes in order to create this strategic linkage, so that it no longer appears as a relatively minor project of the destination marketing organisation, but rather as a shared priority activity of a number of different stakeholder organisations within the destination, including government departments, economic development agencies, and private sector groupings. This leads naturally to a strategy where the events covering specific industry sectors are targeted as a deliberate vehicle for showcasing the destination’s expertise or ambitions, for attracting global venture capital, and for providing high-level postgraduate education for leading academic institutions.

Emotional engagement

Civic pride is a not an easy thing to quantify or define, but the most successful Ambassador Programmes always incorporate this element into their approaches. Ambassadors have to give up time and expertise with no guarantee of success and no monetary reward; institutions and politicians also need high-minded motivation that goes beyond concrete economic arguments. Activities such as high-profile award ceremonies and the giving of certificates and medals provide a focal point for recognising the contributions of Ambassadors towards the economic, cultural, and social progress in their destinations. No-one agrees to become an Ambassador because they have carried out a cost-benefit analysis – there is always a strong emotional rationale that programme creators need to recognise and make use of.

4. Who to select as Ambassador?

Different programmes around the world employ different criteria for determining who can become an Ambassador. The key issue that all have in common is that each Ambassador should feel a positive emotional bond to the destination and/or the aspirations of that destination. Some of the most successful programmes are very flexible in terms of other requirements apart from this, and include Ambassadors with the following connections:

Ambassador connections

- Born in destination.
- Lives in destination.
- Studied or studies in destination
- Created something in destination (eg work of art; building)
- Long-term family ties to destination
- Passionate supporter of historic figure linked to destination
- Fan of destination or some characteristic of destination

Ambassadors can also be drawn from a very wide range of potential backgrounds, depending on the types of international meetings that the destination is targeting.

Ambassador backgrounds

- Business leaders
- Senior medical practitioners
- Senior medical administrators
- Scientists (non-academic)
- Academic leaders (all fields)
- Postgraduates and graduates
- Political and social leaders and opinion formers
- Writers or commentators
- Celebrities

There is an important difference between those Ambassadors who are actively engaged within an international association, and those more "general" Ambassadors who can be used as the "face" of a bid. The latter category includes actors, sports stars, well-known politicians, and other famous individuals. Some destinations employ the strategy of using insider-association and famous Ambassadors together, with the association Ambassador working on influencing the decision-makers, and the more famous Ambassador providing the voice-over or on-camera personality for bid or invitation videos.



Not all association Ambassadors are equally effective. There are some general characteristics which are highly desirable in Ambassadors, and these are often used to select the top Ambassadors in two-tier programmes or the invitees into programmes which limit themselves to only a small total number of Ambassadors. These traits or skills are set out below:

Useful Ambassador traits or skills
Natural communicator
Internationalist
Passionate about destination
Strong "presence"
Leadership skills/influential figure
Recognised expert
Groundbreaking researcher
"Rising star"
Strong reputation/ethical



5. Key components in an Ambassador Programme

Not every programme needs to adopt every element that is set out below, but it provides a useful check-list for analysing whether a component should be included in a newly created programme, or for reviewing the effectiveness of existing schemes.



Decide who "owns" the programme

Should it be the CVB, a committee of suppliers, a stakeholder group including Ambassador representatives, or some other body? Who has the power to allocate funding, to decide on strategy, to set operational priorities.

Create Mission Statement

What is the long-term strategic rationale for the Ambassador Programme; is this something that will engender long-term support from key stakeholders and funding bodies?

Identify strategic approach and key objectives



Which model is going to be adopted (eg single-tier versus double-tier)? What size and sophistication of programme is going to be set up? What will success look like?

Allocate funding and staff resources

Ideally a specific individual should be identified as leading the programme; ideally clear (multi-year) funding and responsibilities should be clearly identified.

Document all aspects of the Ambassador Programme

Setting down every important aspect of the programme in writing, and even getting stakeholders to formally sign up to it, can help in ensuring its long-term survival.

Set up Ambassador-search process

Careful selection of Ambassadors is critical, and larger programmes often allocate significant resources (staff time especially) into regularly searching through local universities and other institutions to identify appropriate candidates, and to link targeted conferences with potential local contacts.

Create marketing & activity plan

This could include newsletters, e-bulletins, travel budget for trips with Ambassadors to promotions and bids, database investment, bid materials, functions, award events, etc. This plan should be fully integrated with the broader sales and marketing plan aimed at the international meetings sector.

Set up PR plan and procedures

Bid wins are a perfect opportunity to create positive PR, and the use of the Ambassador as the “face” or “voice” of the winning bid makes it easier to craft a human-interest storyline, focusing on the subject matter of the congress and what motivated the Ambassador to bring the event to their home destination. PR plans can be prepared for local media (to influence local public opinion), for international meetings media, and for the specialist media covering the field of the event which has been won.

Determine detailed qualifications to be an Ambassador

Set out the responsibilities, the rules and the process, not only for joining but also, where appropriate and at the right time for ceasing to be an Ambassador.

Define and communicate expectations

This applies both to the Ambassadors and to all other stakeholders, including local meetings industry suppliers.

Create CRM/IT system

Long-term management of the programme depends on effective Customer Relationship Management tools and processes (including a good database-based IT product), so that the programme directors have a clear overview of current activity levels, bids in progress, engagement of Ambassadors, potential bid targets, and ongoing communication.

Build top-level relationships

Time needs to be allocated by senior meetings industry figures to engage with leading Ambassadors and other key stakeholders, to communicate the vital role that they are playing.

Build communication channels/networking opportunities

Regular electronic and face-to-face communication is essential to keep Ambassadors engaged, motivated, and active.

Involve key meetings industry suppliers

Hotels, PCOs, and other key local suppliers should be fully engaged with the Ambassador Programme, to maintain continuing support for the long term goals but also to demonstrate to Ambassadors the amount of professional support they will enjoy from local meetings professionals, in the bidding process and when their event eventually takes place. However, carefully managing this process is very important, so that Ambassadors are not exposed to suppliers competing with one another in an inappropriate manner.



Plan to overcome “natural” resistance

Many eventual Ambassadors start out by being very nervous about bidding or becoming a host of an international event. The best programmes provide clear assistance and information to overcome these concerns.

Training for Ambassadors

This can include presentation and media skills, awareness-building about meeting planning issues, product/destination knowledge, etc. Not many Ambassadors will be “natural” sales persons!

Subventions and other support for events

Ensure Ambassadors are fully aware of all support that is available for bidding and running international event, including interest-free loans, discounts or grants to strategically important events which meet specific criteria, provision of marketing materials, etc.

Motivation and awards process

This can include dinners, concerts, award presentations, media interviews and other activities designed to recognise the important contribution of the Ambassadors. These are ideal opportunities to create a mutually-beneficial interface between political leaders, meetings industry leaders, and present and potential Ambassadors.

NB: Experienced Ambassador Programme organisers advise strongly against giving monetary rewards to Ambassadors who succeed in winning bids.



Ongoing renewal and refreshment of programme

Some programmes have very successful launch periods, followed by periods of low activity. It is important to have a stream of recruitment of new Ambassadors, to retire non-active Ambassadors, and to maintain motivation and momentum.

Make full use of ICCA Association Database

There is a vast amount of relevant information stored in this database that is available only to ICCA members, which can be used to identify new Ambassadors, to prepare for bidding, and to identify other ICCA members who have previously hosted targeted events and can supply information that is not available from public sources.

The screenshot displays the ICCA Association Database search interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the ICCA logo and several icons: Home, New search, Saved selection, Big Data, Bookmarks, Notes, Hot leads, and Business Exchange. On the right side of the navigation bar, it says "Welcome Ronaldo Cardano" and "Manual | Logout" with "Last login: 13 October 2015". Below the navigation bar, there is a breadcrumb trail "Home > Search". The main content area features a search section with a green header "Search" and an information icon. Below the header, it asks "What are you looking for?" and provides a "Free text search" input field with a "Go" button. There are also radio button options for search criteria: "Only text" (selected), "Potential meetings for...", "Confirmed meetings in...", and "Organisation details...". At the bottom of the search section, there are "Search" and "Reset" buttons.

6. Practical support for Ambassadors

All of the following are used by some Ambassador Programmes around the world. Some utilise a large number of these methods of support. Clearly some activities require vastly larger financial input than others, and will depend on the initial strategic decisions regarding the scope and scale of the Programme.

- Financial analysis into whether hosting the event is viable, profitable, or too risky.
- Ambassador-specific printed or electronic newsletter for information, motivation, and to recognise successes.
- Destination training; access to destination expertise.
- Presentation and/or media training.
- Sponsorship for Ambassador to attend events or present papers/abstracts.
- Sponsorship to assist Ambassador to be elected to a position of influence within their association.
- Bid document preparation and/or funding.
- Assistance in booking venues and suppliers.
- Assistance in obtaining attractive bedroom rates and managing delegate accommodation.
- Advice on selecting an appropriate Professional Congress Organiser with the right experience and expertise.
- Provision of delegate packs, discounts, travel passes, etc.
- Legal advice regarding contracts, VAT and tax, insurance & liability issues, etc.
- Assistance in preparing budgets within bids.
- Bid marketing support, both material and personnel attendance.
- Event marketing support to boost delegate attendance.
- Motivation and recognition programme (including awards events).



- Access to low or zero interest pre-event funding.
- Subventions enabling reduced price quotations or cash-back arrangements to associations for strategically important events.
- Access to civic hospitality (eg civic reception hosted by city, or sponsorship of gala event).
- Ambassador-to-Ambassador programmes, with successful bidders used to motivate and recruit new Ambassadors.

7. Stages in the bidding & event hosting process

The role of Ambassadors changes as the process of bidding for an international association meeting progresses, and in the run up to and after the event itself. This summary indicates how their input can best be utilised during the different stages of this process.

Research

Ambassadors can be identified through the ICCA database and other research techniques; alternatively, existing Ambassadors can be a valuable source of knowledge about new events and new opportunities to bid for existing regular events, provided the programme has been designed to routinely obtain this information.

Identification of bid process and key decision-making criteria

Whilst some associations have written documentation concerning their decision-making rules, and whilst ICCA's database also contains valuable information related to this subject, frequently the Ambassador will have an insider's knowledge that goes beyond this, including those criteria which are never written down (eg political influences; personal views of key decision-makers). This can be further supplemented by consulting with ICCA colleagues who have previously bid for the event.

Decision to bid

This is where a motivated Ambassador is invaluable. Local support, or willingness to bid and to host, is usually an absolutely critical element in the decision-making process. Successful Ambassador Programmes have this as their central core role, focusing on supporting and persuading as many Ambassadors as possible to take this step.



A key step in deciding whether to bid is to evaluate the budgetary ramifications of bidding and hosting. Ambassadors may need to be persuaded not to bid should the evaluations show that the event is not financially viable for either the local host committee or the destination.

Support of bid process

Teamwork between the Ambassador and meetings professionals throughout the often lengthy bidding process is very important, making sure that the Ambassador has all the destination-specific information and tools needed to conduct an effective campaign, and obtaining feedback from within the association about their objectives and views on the bidding destination.

Celebration of bid success

Ambassadors need to be recognised for success, not just to maintain their ongoing individual commitment, but also for the general health of the programme. Giving the Ambassador the primary credit for success is a very effective way to forge strong relationships with local institutions.



Event marketing

The Ambassador can be used as the “face” of marketing efforts aimed at attracting more delegates to the event, adding a personal dimension to traditional destination-appeal arguments.

Hosting the event

Once the event arrives in the destination, this is another great opportunity to both recognise the success of the Ambassador, and to recruit a new generation of Ambassadors. It is also another opportunity to create engagement between politicians, meetings industry leaders, and Ambassadors and their institutions.

Post-event

Once a major event is successfully staged, the Ambassador can join the ranks of “elder statesmen” within an inner circle of top Ambassadors, with all kinds of PR and marketing opportunities. However, a decision needs to be made as to whether the Ambassador should be “retired”.

8. Ambassador “exit strategies”

It’s often far easier to appoint an Ambassador than to remove the designation, and the potential for creating misunderstandings and annoyance shouldn’t be underestimated. Unless the programme is regularly “filtered” to remove inactive and non-productive Ambassadors, it is likely to become increasingly difficult to manage and utilise efficiently.



Which ever approach is adopted, it is recommended that this is documented clearly and that rules are communicated to Ambassadors when they are first recruited. Clearly the greater the prestige associated with being an Ambassador, the greater the potential for bad feeling if removing the status is not handled or communicated effectively.

The following are approaches that are employed by different programmes around the world.

No exit strategy

Ambassadors are invited “forever” unless they voluntarily leave.

Sleeping Ambassadors

Quietly forget about those who no longer have potential to attract business, or create an unofficial “sleeping Ambassador” category, whose members can be re-activated whenever this proves useful.

Activity-linked status

Monitor activity levels; remove if inactive for a specified time.

Potential capacity status

Automatically remove if Ambassadors change jobs/roles, or if for some other reason they are no longer in a position to bid or influence a bid.

Set period rule

Specify a set period for which an individual will serve as an Ambassador, with an option to renew if mutually desirable.

Protection of destination reputation

Create rules to be able to remove Ambassador status from individuals who behave in such a manner as to damage the reputation of the destination (eg accepting inappropriate site inspection visits to other destinations).

Honour past work approach

Make presentations/awards/certificates to all those who are removed to recognise their past work and to remove their status in a positive, “gentle” manner.

Two-tier Ambassador status

Limit the total number of permitted “official” Ambassadors, who then help to recruit temporary Ambassadors for the duration of each specific bid.

9. Challenges & threats to Ambassador Programmes

These programmes can be highly complex, involve numerous stakeholders, and only deliver quantifiable benefits over the long-term. These factors make them susceptible to a range of dangers and challenges.



Funding withdrawal

Without long-term financial commitment from all the key stakeholders, programmes can quickly suffer from shortages of staff and funding for programmes. Once well established, with a pipeline of successful bids and events taking place within the destination, this typically becomes less of a problem, but in the early years of any programme this can be a serious concern.

Loss of institutional support

It is advisable to develop relationships with multiple contacts in local universities, medical centres and other institutions, so that the retirement of a prominent Ambassador does not result in loss of a relationship with their institution.

Shifting Ambassador allegiance

It can take a lot of time, effort and expenditure to build up an Ambassador. At the city level, there is always a danger of an Ambassador deciding that their primary responsibility is to represent their country, and to be less loyal to a specific city. It may be that other cities have stronger infrastructure or other factors that would make them better candidates. The depth of loyalty of Ambassadors to the city is a very important factor to know as early as possible.

Ambassador privilege-focus

There is always a danger of individual Ambassadors getting to love the “prestige” aspects of the role too greatly: invitations to dinners and concerts, press coverage, etc, whilst ignoring the responsibility side of the equation where they are expected to bid for events. Getting this balance right is always challenging.



Inadequate IT systems

As Ambassador programmes grow in size and complexity, the management of the programme and especially the individual status of each Ambassador becomes increasingly challenging. Having a good IT database-driven system is essential, containing all relevant information regarding research, bid status, Ambassador personal data, future actions, etc.

Ambassador over-enthusiasm

It's important to be clear about the differences between the role of the Ambassador and the role of the meetings marketer. There have been examples where Ambassadors start to take on too many of the marketing professionals' roles.

Promises not delivered by CVB

If commitments are made to Ambassadors, it is vital that the director of the programme, which is usually the CVB, delivers these in full. Demotivated and unhappy Ambassadors are a negative asset, and can damage the best sales and marketing work. And re-engaging them after such an experience is extremely difficult.

Danger of NOT having an Ambassador Programme

This is probably the biggest danger! Every destination possesses a pool of potential Ambassadors, and if these individuals are not being locally recruited, supported, educated and motivated, one should have no doubt that competitors will be moving in to recruit these individuals to support rival city programmes.

10. ICCA & Ambassador Programmes

There are numerous ways in which Ambassador Programmes can interact with ICCA's research tools, networking and business opportunities. ICCA encourages all destinations which are serious about international association meetings to include such programmes within their strategies for this market sector.



Identify new Ambassadors

The ICCA database follows 12,000+ regularly occurring association events, with hundreds of new series added each year by our team of researchers. This provides a constant stream of new opportunities to identify and recruit new Ambassadors. All ICCA members should regularly access the database to identify new business opportunities such as this.

Build complex understanding of targeted events

Ideally each Ambassador profile should be linked to the relevant event or events in the ICCA database, so that bidding plans are made on the basis of the most comprehensive possible data.

Inside information from ICCA colleagues

Members are encouraged to find out inside knowledge about events from other ICCA members who may have successfully bid for or hosted a target event, and therefore possess valuable inside information. This can be provided to the Ambassador to help when they are conducting the bid.

Traditional exchanges of knowledge between ICCA members are significantly enhanced when Ambassador knowledge is added to the equation.

ICCA client-supplier workshops

Ambassadors can frequently be appropriate clients for ICCA members to bring to these valuable workshops, where each participating ICCA member gets to meet up to 15 new clients (or Ambassadors who can influence decisions).

Association programmes at IMEX and EIBTM

ICCA is the lead partner with both IMEX and EIBTM with regard to their international association programmes. Many Ambassadors will be suitable candidates to be invited as Hosted Buyers to these events.

ICCA members' Ambassador Programmes

Through this document and future initiatives, ICCA wishes to encourage members to learn from the different models used by their colleagues in different destinations.

11. Examples of ICCA member programmes

Aberdeen

Launched programme in 2001, linked directly to city economic development strategy, and now has 50 active Ambassadors amongst a total database of 300. 60% of the city's association meetings business is directly attributable to the programme.

www.aberdeenconferences.com/ambassadors

Durban

The recently established Durban KwaZulu-Natal Convention Bureau has established a dedicated Ambassador Programme made up of important representatives of the business and academic community in the city of Durban and the rest of the province of KwaZulu-Natal who are members of professional associations. The intention of this programme is to garnish the support of these individuals to assist in identifying and bidding for key meeting and other business event opportunities. "We are pleased that some 30 key stakeholders have formally registered to be members of this programme. This is a significant achievement if one considers that leading edge convention bureaus of the like of Business Events Sydney, who also established such a programme in 2009, did so with some 23 initial members. This programme has now grown to some 60 members.

Edinburgh

Recruited from the city's academic and professional institutions, the Edinburgh Ambassador Programme was launched in 1996 and now has over 600 active ambassadors. Over 70% of conferences are won due to the role played by the key local contact.

The markets Marketing Edinburgh Convention Bureau focus on are varied and include finance, life sciences, renewables, and creative industries. They run 2 - 3 events per year for Ambassadors and send a newsletter out twice a year

Estonia

Estonian Ambassador Programme was launched in 2010 and there are 112 registered Ambassadors as of today. Programme is run by Estonian Convention Bureau in close cooperation with Tallinn City Tourist Office & Convention Bureau, Tartu Convention Bureau and local universities. Specialists and scientist who have international contacts and who are interested in inviting the conferences of their international network to Estonia are invited to join the Ambassador Programme. Support in bidding and event planning, informational seminars, newsletters as well as special networking events are the benefits for Ambassadors who have joined the programme. Once a year newly joined Ambassadors and outstanding achievements of Ambassadors in bidding and/or organising conferences are recognised at a festive dinner event.

Glasgow

Very large-scale programme and the first such programme in the UK. Relationships with institutional leaders are a key element of the programme, so that they continuously recruit from their staff and members. The programme is part of the city's economic development strategy, positioning the city as part of the high-value knowledge economy.

www.peoplemakeglasgow.com/ambassadors

Ireland

Meet in Ireland, the global business tourism brand for Ireland runs a longstanding conference Ambassador programme. Ambassadors are motivated and supported to bid for future international association conferences. The Meet in Ireland team along with the Regional Convention Bureaux assists their conference ambassadors both practically and by managing a fund to support bids, site inspections and marketing for international association conferences. Assistance to promote confirmed conferences is also a key activity of this programme to ensure high delegate turnout.

www.meetinireland.com/conferenceambassador

Melbourne

The Club Melbourne Ambassador program was launched in 2005 as a collaborative strategy supported by the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, the Melbourne Convention + Visitors Bureau, and the State Government of Victoria. It now has over 130 top level, internationally recognised Ambassadors from a variety of fields including science, medicine and technology. The programme not only assists in bidding for targeted business events, but also creating new events for the city, by working with Ambassadors to help them realise their educational and business development objectives.

Poland

Has run national programme through the national convention bureau and local association for 12 years, nominating a maximum of 20 new Ambassadors each year. There are 120 active Ambassadors at present. An annual gala dinner is held to celebrate those who've successfully won bids.

Puerto Rico

The Puerto Rico Convention Bureau has over 400 Ambassadors. Every year the bureau has an event in which they recognise the distinguished ambassadors and provide them with a medal. Furthermore the bureau has a customised website, brochures and collateral materials.

www.ambassadorpr.com

Shanghai

The Shanghai's programme was launched in 2006, and 71 Ambassadors were appointed in six years from 2006-2011. In 2012 we will appoint ambassadors again in the middle of the year.

www.meet-in-shanghai.net/conference_ambassadors_2.php

Singapore

A dedicated team from the Singapore Exhibition & Convention Bureau runs the Programme, and they organise quarterly events that reach out to a core group of Ambassadors. The engagements are Experiential, Educational and Networking in nature.

Sydney

Business Events Sydney now has 60 Ambassadors, mostly people who have led a bid and/or chaired a significant congress in the city. Members of the bureau's bid team are responsible for the day to day management of individual Ambassadors, whilst the recruitment and overall programme management is handled centrally.

Profiles of the Ambassadors can be found under Meet Some Ambassadors on the following:

www.businesseventsydney.com.au

Vancouver

Has an extensive program founded in 1996, part-funded by the Vancouver Convention Centre. The programme includes customized marketing collateral, presentations at local universities, hospitals and research facilities, and training programs to make Ambassadors as effective as possible.

<http://www.tourismvancouver.com/meetings/host/>

Vienna

The Convention Bureau doesn't have a formal programme, but major venues such as Hofburg Congress Centre does, with a high quality series of events to which Ambassadors are invited.

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