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THE ASSOCIATION
MAGAZINE

PARTNERSHIPS FOR GROWTH



Going Local: The Benefits of Local Partnerships for International Meetings and Events

For any association organising an international event, local partners (that is, partners located in the host city of the event) offer immeasurable value. The following are just some of the advantages that come with having local event partners:

- Destination knowledge and expertise
- Negotiating power with suppliers
- Fiscal and legal advice that is relevant to the host city
- Facilitated process for obtaining permits and licences
- International meeting leads and intelligence

The fact is, local partnerships are critical to an international meeting's success, and it's vital that associations find and nurture the right local partners. As a network of selected, high-quality PCOs, the World PCO Alliance operates on the premise that international expertise complemented by local partners is the best formula for organising international events. That's why in this article, World PCO Alliance members Nancy Tan of Ace: Daytons Direct, Kaoru Shibuta of Congrès Inc., Nina Freysen-Pretorius of The Conference Company, Yap Sook Ling of Asian Overland Services Tours & Travel, André Vietor of Bco Congressos and Jean-Paul de Lavison of Jpdl International, offer some tips that can help associations optimise the potential of such local partners.

First of all, the term "local partners" is most often associated with suppliers such as caterers, transportation and venues. But local partners extend beyond individual suppliers and can include:

- Universities and other academic institutions;
- Government;
- Industry;
- City councils;
- Media;
- Sponsors.

When considering a local partner, here are the key qualities to look for:

- Professionalism;
- Excellent cultural/destination knowledge - a partner that is familiar with the cultural/governmental context of that particular location can save the association much time and potential headaches as well as open the door to opportunities such as government incentives in the region;
- Ability to imbue the local culture into the event;
- Access to an extended network of suppliers – if your partner has a good reputation, they'll be able to introduce you to other partners that might be beneficial for your event;

- Access to potential new members - a partner that can introduce an association to a pool of qualified leads for new members is a good local partner to have;
- New research/knowledge on industry products and services - this is primarily of value to events in the scientific/research domain. Local partners who have insight into relevant breakthroughs can bring some exciting possibilities for an event.

The Covid pandemic has affected all areas of the meeting industry, including the association-local partner relationship. In addition to the above list of qualifications, associations should also be asking themselves the following questions:

- Does this partner appear versatile enough to adapt to any unexpected changes that may come our way?
- Is this partner skilled at performing a thorough risk and safety assessment?
- Has this partner succeeded in continuing to build its skill set and qualifications?

Speaking of the pandemic, Covid has only reinforced the value of (and, in some cases, the necessity for) local

partners. Associations organising international events have felt the need to protect themselves as much as possible, in the form of force majeure clauses in contracts, the ability to negotiate rates that meet the association's budget, and finding the right staffing due to short lead times and availability of skills and personnel. Moreover, while the hybrid event model, which became very popular during the pandemic, is still being used, the return to face-to-face meetings is clearly on the rise, and delegates are eager to participate in person. Associations thus need to put in extra effort to make in-person attendance as appealing as possible, and high-level destination knowledge is a key component.

Some associations may wonder, in an increasingly "borderless" world, is the locality of a partner all that important? The answer is yes. Ironically, in our "borderless" world, customisation is highly sought after, and this customisation can only come with local partners. Associations want to deliver an event that is authentic and complementary to the cultural and regional context of that host destination, and the fact is, there will always be nuances, rules and standards that differ from country to country. Local partners eat, sleep and breathe the destination; if they can help an association optimise the customisation experience, then such partners are more valuable than ever before. Even from an exclusively logistical perspective, local partners are the ideal solution for the so-called "last-mile" portion of the event planning journey. They have the knowledge of what is happening on the ground, they have realistic expectations of the delegate and supplier market, and a sense of what is possible and not possible.

If we look beyond pure logistics, however, and set our sights on the bigger picture, local partners have the potential of being a significant driver for overall change. They can be an instrument for unity and collaboration among all local stakeholders involved, providing real value to not only event attendees but to the association and its overall mission.



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