



How to Work With Sports Commissions

In reality, the title of this piece should be “How to Work with Host Organizations.” The sports events travel industry has changed greatly since the late 1980s when there were about 30 sports commissions in the United States. Today, more than 400 communities have some level of expertise in attracting sports events. There are about 110 sports commissions (sometimes referred to as sports authorities, foundations, etc.) with the rest primarily convention and visitors bureaus (CVBs). This means there are many more CVBs active in the industry (close to 300) than there are sports commissions.

What has changed? Cities have learned that hosting sports events can be good business. They have learned primarily by joining the National Association of Sports Commissions (NASC), the industry’s trade association, founded in 1992 by 15 host organizations. The purpose was to create a forum for the exchange of ideas on what was working and not working from their side of the table.

As the association started to grow, CVBs were invited to join. By the time 250 or so cities had become members, the door was also opened to event owners. Today, about 125 event owners are in the NASC and are contributing expertise from the other side of the table!

Sports destinations, facilities and host organizations have learned a great deal about what it takes to make business decisions on the best way to present events. It does little good for the event owner, the destination or the facility to make wrong decisions. How can these be avoided?

The host organization and the facility or facilities should work closely to pres-

ent a united invitation to the event owner. They need to evaluate what it will take to be successful and make sure they can deliver before the bid. The event owner must also look closely at each invitation to make certain the prospective host has anticipated all of the requirements. All parties are learning the best way to ac-

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complish these things is through a complete exchange of information.

How does this work?

There is a direct relationship between the quality of information provided by the event owner and the usefulness of the host organization’s response. A clearly articulated Request of Proposal that clearly sets forth all of the hosting requirements permits thorough analysis by the host organization. We believe the best procedure is for the owner to send the request to the host organization and not to a facility or a hotel, unless the owner anticipates handling most of the details himself. While it is true that a significant number of events are hosted for the owner directly by, for example, a park and recreation department, neither can know what else might be done if the host organization was involved.

Host organizations should know how to marshal the resources of the community behind the event. They will understand the facilities that are available, will know where to turn to assist in or handle hotel bookings, and attend to all the de-

tails, including volunteers, transportation, signage, kick-off celebrations, team hospitality, VIP hospitality, and promotional activities. This approach will lead to the same facilities that might have been offered by the parks department but without these additional services.

We have noticed an increase in the

amount of information sharing that takes place in the site selection process. This is a healthy development. The owner must know all details will be handled. The host organization must realize that although it may be motivated by room nights, the event itself is not about room nights, it is about the competition. For the parties to get to this point, homework is required!

Everyone involved in the decision process must get answers to their questions. To the event owner’s it must be clear that no details will be overlooked. The host should balance the investment of time, money, volunteers, etc., against the anticipated return which, for many hosts, is visitor spending.

At the end of the day an agreement not to proceed is often the best thing that can happen. In fact, not doing the deal and waiting for the right one to come along can pay major dividends to all.

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