

# **THE MOTIVES OF AMBASSADORS IN BIDDING FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION MEETINGS AND EVENTS**

**Report prepared for the International Congress and  
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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report presents the findings of a cooperative project undertaken by the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) and Victoria University into the role 'Ambassadors' play in bidding for international meetings and events. The study provides insights into a topic for which limited research has been undertaken – that of the bidding process for business events in general and more specifically, the motives of Ambassadors in becoming active bidders for international meetings and events.

## **Method**

There were three key phases to the study:

- 1) A review of the limited academic literature specifically pertaining to Ambassadors programs and more generally, the bidding process for business events.
- 2) A brief review of the ICCA's practitioner material on Ambassador Programs.
- 3) An online survey of Ambassadors from three Programs: Club Melbourne (Melbourne Convention Exhibition Centre), Sarawak Convention Bureau Ambassadors Conference Scholarship Program (Sarawak Convention Bureau) and Al Safeer (Dubai Convention Centre).
  - In total, 288 Ambassadors across the three Programs were approached to participate in the study.
  - Key components of the questionnaire included demographic information (e.g., gender, age, education, current employment profile, association linkages, etc.), Ambassador motivations for bidding and the outcomes of recent bidding activities.
  - The questionnaire was administered during October 2012, with reminders sent via the Program Organisers during this period in order to boost the response rate.
  - At the close of the survey period, 56 responses had been received from across the three Programs for an overall response rate of 19.4%.

## Findings

### Literature Review

Key findings of the review of the academic and practitioner literature include:

- Recent academic studies assessing progress in the field have failed to highlight Ambassador Programs as a fertile topic for future research.
- Studies continue to focus on service satisfaction and site selection processes of meeting planners and associations.
- There was only one mention of Ambassador Programs in the academic literature, which highlighted Ambassador Programs were one of seven critical factors associated with successful business tourism destinations.
- ICCA's practitioner guide details the potential return on investment to destinations from hosting an Ambassador Program and provides an overview of some of the strategic considerations destination marketing organisations (DMO) should consider when setting up such a Program.

### Online Survey Findings

- The profile of respondents showed that the majority were male (64%), with a postgraduate qualification (89%) employed on a full-time basis (79%), with the most common grouping of Ambassadors (36%) aged 50-59 years.
- Common occupations of the Ambassadors surveyed included Director (19.6%), Professor (14.3%), Doctor (12.5%), Manager (10.7%) and Associate Professor (8.9%).
- 57% of respondents were members of a nationally based professional association and 70% were associated with an equivalent international association.
- 48% of respondents sat on a government committee or advisory body, 12.5% were members of a sporting club and 10.7% were members of a trade association (either nationally or internationally based) holding executive roles associated with their various memberships.
- 29% of the Ambassadors surveyed held a chairing role, 11% that of secretary, 4% treasurer, with a further 39% holding general Board or Committee membership or a sub-Committee role.
- The majority of Ambassadors were relatively new to their Program, with only 29% of respondents being appointed as members for four years or more.

- Just over one-third of Ambassadors did not attend any official Program functions or events, therefore failing to fully engage with their Program and fellow Ambassadors.
- Respondents were regular attendees of international meetings and events.
- 98% of the Ambassadors surveyed had attended at least one international meeting or event during the previous two years, with 30% reporting having attended seven or more such events.
- Approximately two-thirds of the Ambassadors surveyed had been involved in a bid to host an international event in the previous two years, 76% of which had proven successful with Ambassador input.
- The main motives of Ambassadors in bidding for international meetings and events were strongly associated with the potential:
  - Prestige or recognition for the Ambassadors professional association or body.
  - Economic benefits to be bestowed on their professional association or body as a result of a successful bid, together with these same benefits flowing on to their host destination.
- Personal benefits such as increased personal or professional profile for the Ambassador ranked lower in terms of importance.
- The importance of professional networks in facilitating bidding action was highlighted with an Ambassador unlikely to champion a bid if support at the local level is not forthcoming.
  - Resources and the support of the local meetings industry were also highly valued by Ambassadors.
- There was strong support from Ambassadors for the value of Programs in enabling destinations to attract international meetings and events.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Destinations around the world increasingly compete to host globally roaming association meetings and conferences in recognition of the benefits these high yield events afford. The International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) estimates 21,000 association meetings and events are held worldwide on a recurring basis by governments and associations, with approximately USD 13 billion of expenditure generated by this sector in 2011 (ICCA, 2012a). More generally, business events can bring a raft of tourism-related benefits to regions including enhanced destination image and minimization of seasonality impacts (Haven-Tang, Jones & Webb, 2007). In their report on business events, Jago and Deery (2010, p. 3) call for quantification of their 'beyond tourism benefits', which they purport to include knowledge generation and dissemination and performance enhancement.

In response to the competitive pressures associated with bidding for international association meetings, Ambassador Programs have sprung up around the world to harness the input of local leaders into the bidding process. ICCA, the membership body representing suppliers (e.g., destination marketing organizations [DMOs], venues, etc.) of the international meetings market, suggest that this innovation, aimed at professionalizing the bidding process at the local level, has occurred over the last decade (ICCA, 2012b). Normally hosted by a DMO (e.g., a convention bureau), Ambassador Programs serve to enable the host "to work with those individuals who are willing, and in a position, to influence, directly or indirectly, the conference destination decisions of the professional institutions to which they belong" (Davidson & Rogers, 2006, p. 143). In putting forward bids as either individuals as part of a formal bidding group, or representing a formal chapter of an association (ICCA, 2012b), Ambassadors act as a conduit through which destinations can proactively identify and attract international meetings and events.

In a how-to guide for members on setting up Ambassador Programs, ICCA highlights the following list of potential backgrounds that might make for suitable Ambassadors, depending on the types of international meetings and events that a destination is attempting to target: business leaders, senior medical practitioners, scientists, academic leaders, political and social leaders/commentators and celebrities (ICCA, 2012b). Furthermore the importance of Ambassadors having strong links to the destination they are representing, whether it is their place of birth, current place of residence or study, is also highlighted. These high profile individuals can drive bids through their associations or be the face of the bid representing the destination as a whole (e.g., in the case of celebrities). Apart from bidding, there is a social element to Ambassador Programs. Davidson and Rogers (2006, p. 144) note the

importance of Program hosts keeping their Ambassadors motivated and informed with one means of doing so being “regular Ambassador Dinners, which act as recruiting and networking events, providing opportunities for Ambassadors to meet each other, exchange innovative ideas for attracting conferences to the destination and congratulate successful members of the programme”.

Numbers of Ambassadors per Program vary, with some Programs intensively managing 20 Ambassadors up to Programs within excess of 1,000 members (ICCA, 2012b). Glasgow is a prominent example of a large-scale Program with over 2,000 members, 1,200 of which are active bidders (Glasgow City Marketing Board, 2012; ICCA, 2012b). There are no reliable figures on the number of Ambassador Programs worldwide, though anecdotal evidence suggests an increase in uptake as destinations favourably view the competitive advantages associated with these Programs relative to established models such as Club Melbourne (established 2005, cited in Davidson & Rogers, 2006). Ambassador Programs are increasingly seen as a ‘must-have’ in a DMOs’ arsenal of strategies for attracting international meetings and events.

Having explained their background and purpose, this report turns to examine the limited literature relating to Ambassador Programs specifically and event bidding more generally.

## 2. KEY LITERATURE

### 2.1 Academic Literature

The following review of the literature pertaining to Ambassador Programs highlights its relatively recent emergence as a destination-marketing phenomenon. Recent studies assessing progress in the business events field (Lee & Back, 2005; Mair, 2012; Yoo & Weber, 2005) have failed to highlight Ambassador Programs as a fertile topic for future research, with a continued focus on understanding service satisfaction and the site selection processes of meeting planners and associations (Lee & Back, 2005; Yoo & Weber, 2005).

Only one mention of Ambassador Programs in the academic literature was located. Haven-Tang et al. (2007) highlight Ambassador Programs as one of seven critical factors associated with successful business tourism destinations. The UK study goes on to stress that these Programs need to be well funded and that “when associations invite bids from potential destinations, the local association contact is crucial to the bid process” (Haven-Tang et al., 2007, p. 119). Incidentally, the remaining six critical success factors they found to be associated with successful business tourism destinations were:

- Leadership - in the form of a ‘clear vision’ (p. 114), suitably funded and clear lines of communication.
- Networking - allowing for information sharing between destinations and increased awareness of the decision-making processes associated with the international association meetings market.
- Branding - a strong brand clearly communicating the destination to potential tourism customers.
- Skills - appropriate skills to support quality business tourism offerings.
- Infrastructure – including integrated transport infrastructure (air, road, rail), together with a stock of suitable venues and accommodation.
- Bidding - “you’ve got to be in it to win it” (Haven-Tang et al., 2007, p. 118).

The next most closely aligned study to the current research is that of Getz’s (2004) examination of the bidding processes of Canadian convention and visitor bureaus. In highlighting bidding success as becoming more central to the competitiveness of destinations, Getz (2004) laments that most research attention has been paid to “factors influencing decisions to locate meetings and conventions in a venue or destination” (p. 2) and that “little has been published about the reverse process; namely, how destinations select events and make bids” (p. 3). While Getz’s study does not specifically reference Ambassador Programs, its finding that ‘strong partners’ involved in the bidding process was the top-

ranked critical success factor for winning bids by the convention and visitor bureaus studied, is indicative of the role Ambassadors play in representing their associations and working with DMOs as the 'gatekeeper' link to the local partners needed to secure international meetings and events

No other academic studies on the bidding process for business events could be found and likewise no additional works examining the bidding process from the perspective of DMOs could be located, confirming that research has not advanced significantly since Getz's (2004) study.

## **2.2 Practitioner Literature**

ICCA's (2012) publication, *Congress Ambassador Programmes: Everything ICCA members need to know about using local champions to build success in the international association meetings sector* details the potential return on investment to destinations from hosting an Ambassador Program and provides an overview of some of the strategic considerations that DMOs should consider when setting up such a Program. These considerations include a long-term commitment to the established Program, given the long lead times involved in bidding for and if successful, running association events and ensuring alignment of the Program's objectives to those of key local stakeholders (e.g., universities). The document draws attention to the underlying principles of successful Ambassador Programs and as to the range of different models available. ICCA members can also use the publication "as a reference guide when setting up a new programme from scratch or for planning the future evolution of an existing programme" (ICCA 2012b, p. 5).

### **3. STUDY DESIGN**

#### **3.1 Research Aim**

The academic and practitioner literature review highlights that there is very little research currently available to inform our understanding of the role Ambassador Programs play in bidding for international meetings and events. In particular, little is known about the inner workings of Programs, from the personal perspective of the Ambassadors involved.

To address these identified research gaps, the fundamental aim of this study was to obtain direct input from Ambassadors in relation to their motives and experiences in bidding for international meetings and events.

#### **3.2 Method**

A quantitative method was adopted to address the research aim of examining the motives associated with Ambassadors becoming active bidders for international association meetings and events. The current study should be considered exploratory, given the lack of previous research on the role of Ambassadors in bidding for events

ICCA provided Victoria University (a university member of the organisation) seed funding to conduct the study and further supported the research by facilitating access to two Ambassador Programs, one located in Australia (Club Melbourne) and one located in Southeast Asia (Sarawak Convention Bureau Ambassadors Conference Scholarship Program). An additional Program, located in the Middle East (Al Safeer), also agreed to participate in the study. The three Programs sampled offered a mix of new and well-established (from mid-2000) models, two of which can be classed as mid-size Programs (100-150 members), with the remaining Program containing a small cohort of 20 Ambassadors. In total, 288 Ambassadors across the three Programs were approached to participate in the study.

Cost, time and distance constraints dictated the use of an online survey. An invitation to participate in the study was sent to Ambassadors via email from the Program Organisers. The email contained a brief introduction to the study and participants were asked to read an accompanying information sheet, which provided a detailed, plain English explanation of the project, an overview of potential risks of participating and details of the researchers conducting the study. The granting of informed consent by

the respondents was assumed from them having read these details and then clicking on the embedded link contained in the email to complete the survey.

The key components of the survey instrument covered:

- Demographic information (e.g., gender, age, education, current employment profile, association linkages, etc.)
- Motivations for bidding for international meetings and events and
- The outcomes of recent bidding activities.

There was little in the way of previous academic or practitioner work to help guide this study and specifically the design of the questionnaire. Given their support of the current study, the motivation items were developed with input from representatives at ICCA's Head Office in The Netherlands. The final version of the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was administered during October 2012, with reminders sent via the Program Organisers during this period in order to boost the response rate. The online survey was administered in English and hosted on a secure, commercial online survey service known as QSmart. At the close of the survey period, 56 responses had been received from across the three Programs for an overall response rate of 19.4%. This study therefore provides indicative insights into the research topic, which a more robust examination can later seek to confirm.

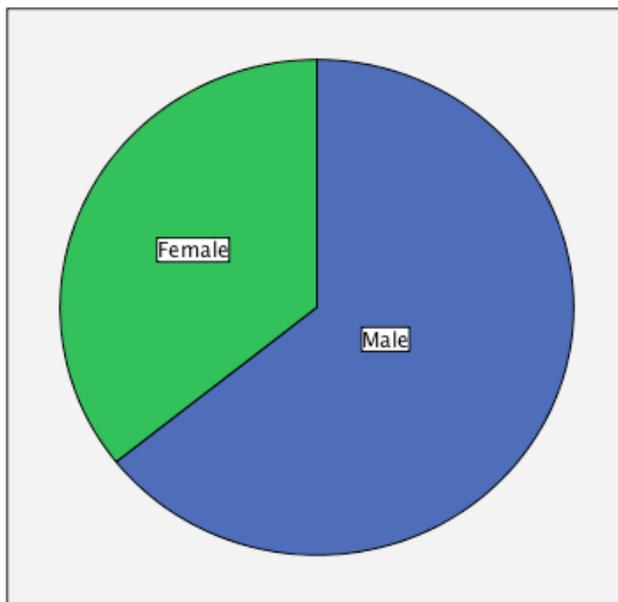
The data was analysed using IBM Statistics (SPSS) v. 20. Descriptive analysis was used for data screening purposes as well as providing a snapshot of the Ambassadors, their motives and their bidding activities. The data yielded the potential for cross-case comparisons of the Ambassadors in the various Programs surveyed. The decision was made based on the relatively small numbers per Program not to proceed with such analysis in order to protect the identity of the participants and the commercial interests of the Program Organisers that had granted access to their Ambassadors for sampling purposes.

## 4. RESULTS

A demographic profile of the Ambassadors surveyed is firstly presented, which in turn is accompanied by a profile of their recent conference attendance and bidding activity.

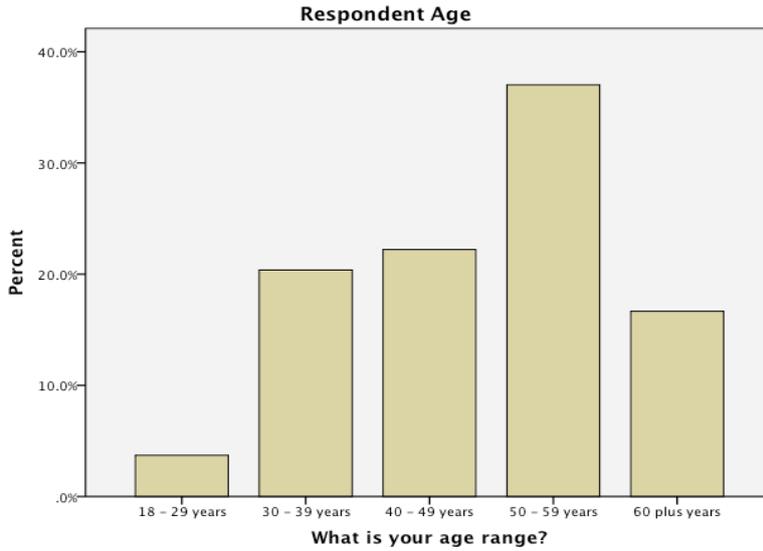
### 4.1 Ambassadors - Demographic Profile

As can be seen in Figure 1, the majority findings indicated that the returned sample was predominantly male (64%).



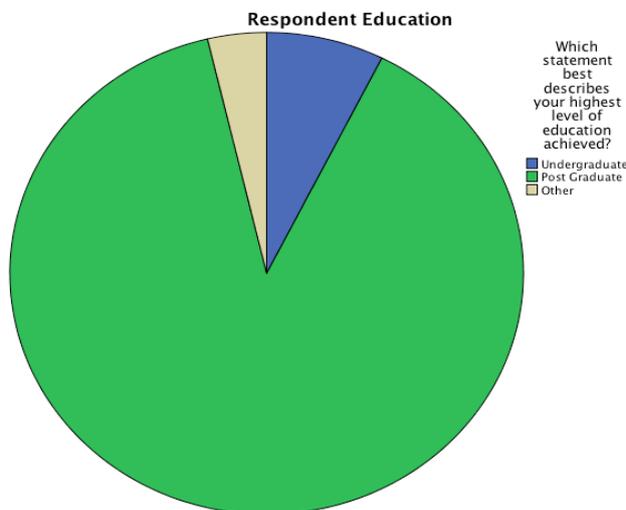
**Figure 1: Respondent Gender**

The age of the respondents was fairly evenly spread across the middle age ranges, with 23% of respondents aged 30-39 years old, a further 21% aged 40-49 years and the most common grouping of Ambassadors (36%) aged 50-59 years.



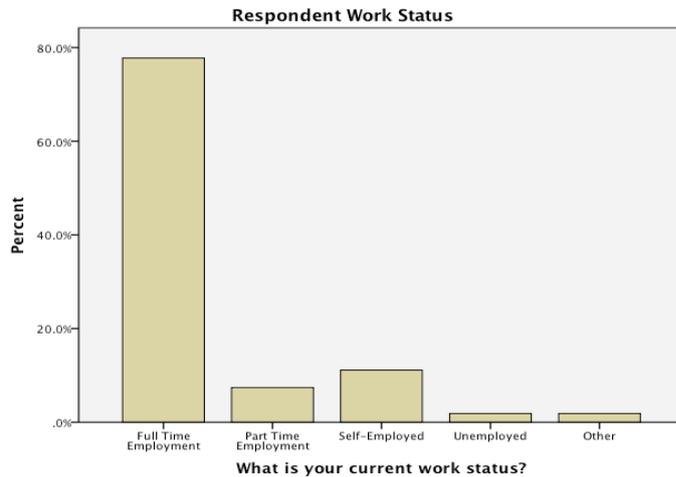
**Figure 2: Respondent Age**

The results presented in Figure 3 indicate that respondents were highly educated with 89% having completed a postgraduate qualification.



**Figure 3: Respondent Education**

The overwhelming majority of respondents were employed on a full-time basis (79%) with common occupations of the Ambassadors surveyed including Director (20%), Professor (14%), Doctor (13%), Manager (11%) and Associate Professor (9%).



**Figure 4: Respondent Work Status**

The importance of Ambassadors and their links to professional associations and other networks cannot be underestimated. Assessed separately, Table 1 highlights that 57% of respondents were members of a nationally based professional association and 70% were associated with an equivalent international association. As previously highlighted, as with the local links to professional associations, the knowledge, networks and insights of Ambassadors are critical to the bidding process (Haven-Tang et al., 2007) for the roaming events these associations own and award the rights for destinations to run.

**Table 1: Membership of Professional Associations**

|                              | Yes |    | No |    |
|------------------------------|-----|----|----|----|
|                              | N   | %  | N  | %  |
| <b>Nationally based</b>      | 32  | 57 | 24 | 43 |
| <b>Internationally based</b> | 39  | 70 | 17 | 30 |

The returned sample of Ambassadors also showed a preponderance of membership of other networks. Table 3 highlights that 48% sat on a government committee or advisory body, 13% were members of a sporting club and 11% were members of a trade association (either nationally or internationally based).

**Table 3: Membership of Other Networks**

|   | Yes |    | No |    |
|---|-----|----|----|----|
|   | N   | %  | N  | %  |
| <b>Trade Association – Nationally based</b>                 | 4   | 7  | 52 | 93 |
| <b>Trade Association – Internationally based</b>            | 2   | 4  | 54 | 96 |
| <b>Government committee, sub committee or advisory body</b> | 27  | 48 | 29 | 52 |
| <b>Chamber of Commerce</b>                                  | 3   | 5  | 53 | 95 |
| <b>Sporting club</b>  | 7   | 13 | 49 | 87 |
| <b>Social club</b>  | 10  | 18 | 46 | 82 |

In addition, Table 4 suggests that Ambassadors were inclined to be active members of these networks, holding executive roles associated with their various memberships. Separately assessed, 29% of the Ambassadors surveyed held a chairing role, 11% that of secretary, 4% treasurer, with a further 39% holding general Board or Committee membership or a sub-Committee role.

**Table 4: Executive Roles**

|  | Yes |    | No |    |
|--|-----|----|----|----|
|  | N   | %  | N  | %  |
| <b>Chairman</b>                                | 16  | 29 | 40 | 71 |
| <b>Secretary</b>                               | 6   | 11 | 50 | 89 |
| <b>Treasurer</b>                               | 2   | 4  | 54 | 96 |
| <b>Board or Committee/Sub Committee Member</b> | 22  | 39 | 34 | 61 |
| <b>No Executive Roles Held</b>                 | 15  | 27 | 41 | 73 |

#### 4.2 Ambassadors – Program and Bidding Activity Profile

Table 5 highlights that the majority of Ambassadors were relatively new to their Programs. Only 29% of respondents being appointed for four years or more.

**Table 5: Ambassador Activity Profile**

| <b>Duration of Program membership</b>  | <b>N</b> | <b>Valid Percentage</b> |
|--|----------|-------------------------|
| <i>Less than 2 years</i>   | 28       | 50.0                    |
| <i>2-3 years</i>   | 12       | 21.4                    |
| <i>4-5 years</i>   | 10       | 17.9                    |
| <i>6-8 years</i>   | 3        | 5.4                     |
| <i>8+ years</i>  | 3        | 5.4                     |
| <b>Number of Ambassador Program events/functions attended in 2011</b>                        |          |                         |
| <i>None</i>  | 20       | 35.7                    |
| <i>1</i>   | 16       | 28.6                    |
| <i>2-3</i>   | 14       | 25.0                    |
| <i>4-5</i>   | 4        | 7.1                     |
| <i>6+</i>  | 2        | 3.6                     |
| <b>Number of international meetings/events attended in the past 2 years</b>                  |          |                         |
| <i>None</i>  | 1        | 1.8                     |
| <i>1-2</i>   | 16       | 28.6                    |
| <i>3-4</i>   | 20       | 35.7                    |
| <i>5-6</i>   | 2        | 3.6                     |
| <i>7+</i>  | 17       | 30.4                    |
| <b>As an Ambassador, number of international meetings/events bid for in the past 2 years</b> |          |                         |
| <i>None</i>  | 19       | 33.9                    |
| <i>1-2</i>   | 28       | 50.0                    |
| <i>3-4</i>   | 7        | 12.5                    |
| <i>5-6</i>   | 1        | 1.8                     |
| <i>7+</i>  | 1        | 1.8                     |
| <b>Outcome of the most recent bid</b>  |          |                         |
| <i>Successful</i>  | 28       | 75.7                    |
| <i>Unsuccessful</i>  | 9        | 24.3                    |

Furthermore the results in Table 5 suggest that in 2011 just over one-third of Ambassadors did not attend any official Program functions or events. Whilst acknowledging there may have been good grounds for this finding (e.g., work and other commitments impinging on availability), the literature (ICCA 20012b; Davidson & Rogers, 2006) clearly indicates the importance that such events play in motivating Ambassadors, keeping them informed of Program aims and allowing them to network with their fellow members. Accordingly this result may be of concern.

Given that the purported role of Ambassador Programs is to enable DMOs to bid for international association meetings and events using the expertise and networks of local leaders, it is pleasing to see that the results in Table 5 generally confirm this to be the case. Approximately two-thirds of the Ambassadors surveyed had been involved in a bid to host an international event in the previous two years. Of those bids, 76% had proven successful with Ambassador input. As ICCA notes in its Ambassador Program guide, “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” (ICCA, 2012b, p. 6). These results lend support to what has been to now largely anecdotal evidence for the value of Ambassador Programs in facilitating bidding success.

In addition to bidding, respondents were also regular attendees of international meetings and events, which for the purposes of this study were defined in the questionnaire introduction as: *congresses, conferences, meetings and all other business events that are regularly occurring, roaming in location (hosted in a new location each time) and competitively bid for*. 98% of the returned sample had attended at least one international meeting or event during the previous two years, with 30% reporting having attended seven or more such events.

The responses of those Ambassadors who had not participated in a bid during the past 2 years (n= 19, 34%) were separately analysed to assess the potential reasons for their not bidding. These results are outlined in Table 6.

**Table 6: Reasons for Non-Bids**

|  | Yes |    | No |    |
|--|-----|----|----|----|
|  | N   | %  | N  | %  |
| <b>No key international events to bid for in my field</b>    | 4   | 21 | 15 | 79 |
| <b>It's not our region's turn to hold the key conference</b> | 3   | 16 | 16 | 84 |
| <b>Concerns over suitable conference facilities</b>          | 3   | 16 | 16 | 84 |
| <b>Concerns over infrastructure</b>                          | 3   | 16 | 16 | 84 |
| <b>Lack of government support</b>                            | 4   | 21 | 15 | 79 |

|  |   |    |    |    |
|--|---|----|----|----|
| <b>Lack of professional body support</b>                             | 2 | 11 | 17 | 89 |
| <b>Could not get consensus/agreement to bid for an event</b>         | 2 | 11 | 17 | 89 |
| <b>Lack of sponsorship support</b>                                   | 5 | 26 | 14 | 74 |
| <b>Budgetary concerns (e.g., cost of the event/potential losses)</b> | 3 | 16 | 16 | 84 |
| <b>Other</b>   | 5 | 26 | 14 | 74 |

### 4.3 Ambassador Motives for Bidding

To address the overriding research aim of examining the motives associated with Ambassadors becoming active bidders for international association meetings and events, the responses of those Ambassadors who had participated in a bid in the previous two years ( $n = 37$ , 66%) were analysed. Motive items were assessed using a seven-point scale labelled from 1 = not at all important through to 7 = extremely important. Descriptive analysis of these items is presented in Table 7, with motives ranked according to importance (highest through to lowest).

**Table 7: Ambassador Motives for Bidding**

| <b>Rank</b> |   | <b>Mean<br/>(n= 31)</b> | <b>Standard<br/>deviation</b> |
|-------------|---|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1           | Prestige or recognition for your professional body                    | 5.58                    | 1.88                          |
| 2           | Professional body support   | 5.52                    | 1.69                          |
| 3           | Prestige or recognition for your country, region or city              | 5.45                    | 1.79                          |
| 4           | Economic benefits for your country, region, city or professional body | 5.06                    | 1.90                          |
| 5           | Increased personal or professional profile                            | 4.81                    | 1.99                          |
| 6           | Government directive/support  | 4.55                    | 2.03                          |
| 7           | A prior indication of a high probability of success by the award body | 4.52                    | 1.67                          |
| 8           | Personal encouragement by key stakeholders                            | 4.48                    | 2.13                          |
| 9           | Prestige or recognition for your employer                             | 4.45                    | 2.06                          |
| 10          | Corporate support   | 4.26                    | 2.03                          |
| 11          | Career benefits   | 4.13                    | 2.13                          |
| 12          | Potential media coverage  | 3.97                    | 2.21                          |
| 13          | Social or other benefits  | 3.77                    | 2.04                          |

The motives of Ambassadors in bidding for international meetings and events appears to be strongly related to the potential prestige, reputation and economic benefits to be bestowed on their professional association or body as a result of a successful bid, together with these same benefits flowing on to their host destination. These rankings would seem to suggest that in the Programs under study, the motives of Ambassadors in bidding for events are quite utilitarian. Whilst there may be a raft of activities hosted by Ambassador Programs (e.g., networking events, award presentations, concerts, etc.), these appear to be of secondary value to the importance Ambassadors place on serving their destinations as a conduit for attracting international meetings and events. Indeed, the importance of the destination and the association appear to go hand-in-hand in motivating Ambassadors to bid, rather than simply engaging with the ancillary activities of these Programs.

Personal benefits as motives for bidding were less highly rated by the Ambassadors surveyed. The highest ranked personal benefit, increased personal or professional profile, weighs in at number five in terms of importance, with social or other benefits afforded the least importance of the motives assessed. Perhaps it is not surprising that another personal benefit, the item assessing 'career benefits' rates relatively lowly (Rank 11). As the demographic data indicated, many Ambassadors were already in senior roles. For most part, their recognised reputation and networks in a particular field would bring about their invitation to become Ambassadors in the first instance. As such, the current results appear to indicate that Ambassadors already leaders in their fields may downplay the importance attached to bidding for international meetings and events as a means of furthering their careers. Organisers might be better placed in selling their Ambassador Programs as a mark of distinction for those already firmly established in their fields.

An open-ended question, queried those Ambassadors that were active bidders on additional motives for their decision to participate in the bidding process to attract international meetings and events. A number of additional factors were also cited as important (see Appendix 2 for the full list). Some of these factors included: recognition of quality teaching and research; a sense of personal obligation; internal politics and the opportunity for local members to attend an international conference.

Additionally, these active Ambassadors were asked what lessons they'd learnt from participating in the bidding process for a globally roaming association meeting or event. A number of responses were provided around the following common themes: preparation/facts, budget/planning and support/networks, highlighting key areas of importance associated with the bidding process (see Appendix 3 for the full list of responses).

#### 4.4 Bidding Considerations

To capture the views of all Ambassadors, those who had (n = 37, 66%) and had not (n= 19, 39%) been active bidders to date, the relative importance of a set of items to the bidding process for international meetings and events was assessed using a seven-point scale (labelled from 1 = not at all important through to 7 = extremely important).

**Table 8: Bidding Considerations**

| Rank | Item (Measured on 7-point scale)                                  | N  | Mean | Standard deviation |
|------|---|----|------|--------------------|
| 1    | Your professional networks  | 47 | 5.96 | 1.30               |
| 2    | Resources available to make a bid                                 | 46 | 5.80 | 1.39               |
| 3    | Support from the local meetings industry                          | 47 | 5.79 | 1.43               |
| 4    | Likely reputational benefits in your field from hosting the event | 47 | 5.74 | 1.44               |
| 5    | Profile of the event  | 46 | 5.70 | 1.38               |
| 6    | Likelihood of bid success   | 45 | 5.27 | 1.53               |
| 7    | Available time  | 45 | 5.24 | 1.63               |
| 8    | Likely economic impact of the event                               | 47 | 5.23 | 1.49               |
| 9    | Your personal networks  | 46 | 5.17 | 1.69               |
| 10   | Cost of bidding   | 47 | 4.68 | 1.96               |
| 11   | Your level of influence over the event if the bid is successful   | 47 | 4.47 | 1.94               |
| 12   | Complexity of bid requirements                                    | 46 | 4.43 | 1.92               |
| 13   | Your role in the event of a successful bid                        | 47 | 4.40 | 1.90               |
| 14   | Risk of not hosting the event successfully                        | 46 | 3.87 | 2.10               |
| 15   | Risk of not bidding   | 46 | 2.80 | 1.76               |

Table 8 indicates that all but one item assessed rated above the scale mid-point (3.5) in terms of importance when bidding for international meetings and events. 'Risk of not bidding', the lowest ranked item, suggests that the Ambassadors surveyed may lack awareness of the competitive bidding environment for international association events and the risk or 'opportunity lost' if bids are not pursued. Ambassadors may not see this as being their area of concern but rather view it as the DMO's responsibility to assess and manage such risks on behalf of their destination.

Once again the importance of professional networks in facilitating bidding action is highlighted. As conduit between the DMO and their particular association or professional body, an Ambassador is

unlikely to champion a bid if support at the local level is not forthcoming. The data also reveals that resources and the support of the local meetings industry are two other requisite precursors to bidding highly valued by Ambassadors. DMOs, working on behalf of the meetings industry, may provide Ambassadors with one or more of the following forms of bidding support: feasibility studies to establish a business case for bidding, assistance with preparing the bid documentation, venue and accommodation booking assistance, provision of delegate packs and marketing collateral and organization of pre and post tours (Getz, 2004; ICCA, 2012b).

Respondents also cited several additional factors as important considerations when bidding for international meetings and events (refer to Appendix 4 for the full list).

#### 4.5 Future Bidding Intentions

The Ambassadors surveyed were queried in regard to their future bidding intentions and overall evaluations of Ambassador Programs as a tool for securing international meetings and events. The results in Table 9 indicate a moderate level of agreement with the bidding intention statements. Given 66% of the respondents had already participated in a bid in the previous two years, of which 76% of bids had proven successful, these indicative statements may suggest that for some Ambassadors surveyed, key international events in their field of expertise had already been bid for quite recently.

**Table 9: Bidding Intentions and Summary Statements**

| <b>Reason<br/>(Measured on scale – 1 to 100)</b>  | <b>N</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>Standard<br/>deviation</b> |
|---|----------|-------------|-------------------------------|
| I intend to bid for an international meeting/event in the next 12 months  | 53       | 63.17       | 29.35                         |
| Beyond the next 12 months, I intend to bid for an international meeting/event in the next 2-3 years               | 54       | 70.20       | 21.69                         |
| My membership of an Ambassador Program has assisted me in bidding for international meetings/events               | 56       | 69.02       | 25.27                         |
| My membership of an Ambassador Program has assisted me in winning bids for international meetings/events          | 55       | 62.22       | 23.22                         |
| Ambassador Programs have an important role to play in ensuring destinations attract international meetings/events | 56       | 78.66       | 17.70                         |

Subsequent bids might not be planned given their roaming nature means “many biddable events are one-time only (or at least they are unlikely to return to a destination frequently)” (Getz, 2004, p. 6). Stronger support is demonstrated for the value of Ambassador Programs in bidding for and securing international meetings and events. Whilst there may be an inherent level of bias, given it is the Ambassadors themselves making this assessment, these results support Haven-Tang et al.’s (2007) earlier finding of the critical role Ambassadors Programs play in driving successful business tourism destinations.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This report provides preliminary support for the role of Ambassador Programs in enabling DMOs to bid for international association meetings and events using the expertise and networks of local leaders to do so.

The following observations have been made from the limited available literature. Ambassador Programs have been recognised for their capacity to facilitate relationships between stakeholders (Getz, 2004; ICCA, 2012b). There has also been recognition of the broader value of business events as drivers for successful destinations and legacies (Jago & Deery, 2010; Haven-Tang et al., 2007). Indeed, Ambassador Programs may prove a tangible conduit through which to examine some of the intangible benefits of the business events sector that are often talked about but rarely studied.

The inner workings of Ambassador Programs and the motives of Ambassadors have to date been unclear. The results of this study indicate Ambassadors were not motivated by personal gain. Rather, the relationship with the wider professional association or body to which the Ambassador was linked was far more significant. Specifically, the more tangible benefits of physical rewards, e.g., through social events, dining or other entertainment, were not strong motives, whilst reputation and prestige for the professional body and destination the Ambassadors were representing came to the fore.

The authors acknowledge the limitations of the current study in quantitatively examining a small cross-sectional sample of Ambassadors. Academics and practitioners alike are likely to increasingly view the Ambassador Program phenomenon as a fertile area of research, building on the findings of this exploratory study.

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**APPENDIX 1: Survey Instrument (subsequently formatted for online administration)**

**Investigating Ambassador Programmes: Motives for Bidding for Events**

Victoria University, on behalf of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), is conducting an exploratory study into the workings of ambassador programs and the role ambassadors play in bidding for international meetings and events. Please click on the enclosed link to complete the online questionnaire. The questionnaire should take 10-15 minutes to complete. This study has ethics approval from Victoria University. All responses will remain strictly confidential. Your participation will provide invaluable information that will be collated in a report for ICCA and its members. **We thank you for your participation.**

**NOTE**

For the purposes of this survey, 'international meetings and events' refers to congresses, conferences, meetings and all other forms of business events that are regularly occurring, roaming in nature (hosted in a new location each time) and competitively bid for.

**Q1. Which of the following ambassador programme do you have membership of?**

- Club Melbourne       Sarawak Ambassadors Conference Scholarship Program       Al Safer

**Q2. How long have you been a member of this ambassador programme?**

- Less than 2 years       2-3 years       4-5 years       6-7 years       8 or more years

**Q3. How many ambassador program events/functions did you attend in 2011?**

- None       1       2-3       4-5       6 or more

**Q4. What is your current job title?**

- |                              |                          |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Chairman                     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| CEO / President              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| COO / CFO                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Vice President               | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Director                     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| General Manager              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Regional Manager             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Manager                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Consultant                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Professor                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Associate Professor          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Doctor                       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other – Please specify _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Q5. In addition to your membership of an ambassador programme, please indicate if you are a member of any of the following (tick all that apply to you):**

- Professional association - national
- Professional association - international
- Trade association - national
- Trade association - international
- Government committee, sub committee, or advisory body
- Chamber of Commerce
- Sporting club
- Social club
- Other – Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**Q6. Do you hold any executive positions/roles associated with the above memberships?**

- Chairman
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Board or Committee Member or Sub Committee Member
- Other role
- No, I do not hold an executive role

**Q7. How many international meetings and events have you attended in the past 2 years?**

- None     1-2     3-4     5-6     more than 6

**Q8. As an ambassador, how many international meetings and events have you been involved in bidding for in past 2 years?**

- 1-2     3-4     5-6     more than 6 – **Go to Q9.**

- None

**If 'None', please indicate if any of the following reasons for not bidding apply (tick all that apply to you):**

- No key international events to bid for in my field
- It is not our region's turn to hold the key conference
- Concerns over suitable conference facilities
- Concerns over infrastructure (transport, accommodation, etc)
- Lack of government support
- Lack of professional body support or enthusiasm
- Could not get consensus/agreement to bid for an event
- Lack of sponsorship support
- Budgetary concerns e.g., cost of event &/or potential losses
- Other – Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**Go to Q13.**

**Q9. Keeping in mind the most recent conference you bid for, please indicate how important each of the following factors was for your participation in the bid. The scale runs from 1 'Not at all important' through to 7 'Extremely important'. For each item select one response.**

- Prestige or recognition for your country, region, or city
- Prestige or recognition for your professional body
- Prestige or recognition for your employer
- Economic benefits for your country, region, city, or professional body
- A prior indication of a high probability of success by the awarding body
- Potential media coverage
- Government directive / support
- Corporate support
- Professional body support
- Increased personal or professional profile
- Career benefits
- Social or other benefits
- Personal encouragement by key stakeholders

**Q10. What, if any, additional factors were important reasons for your participation in the bid?**

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**Q11. Was the bid successful?**

- Yes  No

**Q12. As an ambassador, what lessons did you learn from participating in the bidding process for an international meeting/event?**

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**Q13. As an ambassador, please rate the following factors in terms of their importance when bidding for an international meeting/event. The scale runs from 1 'Not at all important' through to 7 'Extremely important'. For each item select one response.**

- Complexity of bid requirements
- Cost of bidding
- Available time
- Resources available to make a bid
- Your professional networks
- Your personal networks
- Likelihood of bid success
- Profile of the event
- Likely economic impact of the event
- Likely reputational benefits in your field from hosting the event
- Risk of not bidding
- Risk of not hosting the event successfully
- Your role in the event of a successful bid
- Your level of influence over the event if the bid is successful
- Support from the local meetings industry

**Q14. What, if any, additional factors are important to you in bidding for an international meeting/event?**

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**Q15. Do you intend to bid for an international meeting/event in the next 12 months? The scale runs from 1 'Extremely unlikely' through to 7 'Extremely likely'.**

**Q16. Beyond the next 12 months, do you intend to bid for an international meeting/event in the next 2-3 years? The scale runs from 1 'Extremely unlikely' through to 7 'Extremely likely'.**

**Q17. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements. The scale runs from 1 'Strongly disagree' through to 7 'Strongly agree'.**

My membership of an ambassador program has assisted me in bidding for international meeting/events  
 My membership of an ambassador program has assisted me in winning bids for international meeting/events  
 Ambassador programs have an important role to play in ensuring destinations attract international meeting/events

**Q18. As an ambassador, do you have any recommendations for the improvement of your program or ambassador programs in general?**

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**Q19. What is your gender?**

Male       Female

**Q20. What is your age range?**

18-29 years       50-59 years  
 30-39 years       60+ years  
 40-49 years

**Q20. Which statement best describes your highest level of education achieved?**

Secondary School Certificate   
 Technical/Trade School Certificate   
 Undergraduate University Qualification   
 Postgraduate University Qualification   
 Other

**Q21. What is your current work status?**

Full-time   
 Part-time   
 Fixed-term contractor   
 Agency worker or sub-contractor   
 Self-employed   
 Unemployed   
 Other

**THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY**

## **APPENDIX 2: Additional Reasons for the Active Participation of Ambassadors in Bidding**

(Listed in no particular order, identifying references to particular Ambassador Programs removed)

- Recognition of quality teaching, training, education and medical research. Important to host an International Conference to enable presentation and recognition of world-class healthcare.
- A sense of personal obligation.
- I am trying to build a major Congress composed of many smaller conferences.
- Internal federation politics.
- Number of potential delegates - both local and from outside the country. Experts for keynote and plenary must be reputable and well known.
- Opportunity for local members to attend an international conference. Often very restricted in the numbers that can go to international meetings so this brings much greater exposure of ideas and also stimulates professional involvement
- Political cultural reasons involving the social sustainability of the planet and awareness of basic issues confronting humanity, both local and global.
- The location of my institute in the area. The additional science knowledge base around the area that would both benefit from the meeting and contribute. The excellence of the facilities here are important to my participation.
- To bring congresses that never participate in this part of the world which will help in adding knowledge and encourage research.

### **APPENDIX 3: Lessons Learnt by Ambassadors from Bid Participation**

(Listed in no particular order, identifying references to particular Ambassador Programs removed)

- Be extremely well prepared and know the facts.
- Bringing all parties to support the bid together. Never work alone.
- Competitiveness of other bids, the unknown, the nuts and bolts of bidding.
- Detailed budget is very important.
- Firstly, the support from the Convention Bureau; secondly, the detailed planning that must go into a bid document; thirdly, the garnering of community support.
- Formatting and listing what is important and not important for the proposal.
- Get the lobbying right and avoid a clash with other events in the city for cost reasons.
- Getting a good PCO and help from the Convention Bureau is essential.
- Importance of teamwork, importance of professional network.
- It is very important to work as a team.
- It takes a committed team from the discipline (in my case mathematics) to put in a credible bid.
- It takes months of homework and local support is essential.
- Maintain international networks.
- Planning & sponsor support.
- Preparation is the key. Previous experience is really important. Added value of the venue is helpful. Understanding and managing the advantages of other venues.
- Proper planning and official support are the main factors to win the bidding.
- Strong competitive field - always be ahead of your fellow competitors by preparation and anticipation.
- Support of third parties is key.
- That leverage, and financial support in particular, from the government is crucial.
- The local development of the city where the meeting is held.
- The need to gain local support early and to bring monetary support to the meeting. Lobbying of those who will make the vote to demonstrate attractiveness of venue and financial success of the congress.
- There is too much competition whenever a prestigious conference is involved.
- Who I need to involve to make the process successful.
- With an honest effort, you can convince majority of the voting members to support the bid.
- You cannot expect to be successful all the times.

#### **APPENDIX 4: Additional Bidding Considerations**

(Listed in no particular order, identifying references to particular Ambassador Programs removed)

- Support from the national community.
- A good team with whom I can work together on the bidding process.
- Access to as much information as possible about hosting an international event and securing funding prior.
- All factors involved in the bidding must have a checklist.
- As before, be extremely well prepared and know the facts.
- Availability of rooms and sufficient spaces. Collaborative effort of committee members.
- City name and location.
- Contacts and support from international committee.
- Get full support from the government and the NGO.
- Government support.
- Idea of success.
- Support from government and professional bodies.
- The financial success of the meeting for the organisation calling for the bids. Many professional societies rely on the conference for some of its ability to operate between meetings.
- The reputation of organiser(s) - the universities.
- There are the unpredictables such as weather, cyclones, an epidemic or a transport catastrophe
- Timing.
- To provide national travel grants to other participants from other country to come/attend to the convention.
- Transportation, particularly the flight schedule; Most of the foreign participants would prefer to fly non-stop and cheaper airfare. Tourism attraction; It would be much more attractive if the organiser can provide a free of charge pre-conference or post-conference tour. Low conference fees with impact factor journal publication for conference papers; Affordable accommodation and food.
- Understanding of level of support from professional conference organiser and from the city/government. Tourist options pre-and post-event.
- Unity and desire of the bidding committee. Willingness to devote time and effort toward the success of the event.