



Working with
Meetings Management Companies

PCO? DMC? AMC?

Advice for international
association meeting
planners and decision
makers



About ICCA

ICCA – the International Congress and Convention Association – is the global community and knowledge hub for the international association meetings industry.

Throughout its 50-year history, ICCA, the International Congress and Convention Association, has been dedicated to building one single area of expertise: **international association meetings**. ICCA aims to shape the future and value of international association meetings.

ICCA was founded in 1963 by a group of travel agents. Their first and foremost aim was to evaluate practical ways to get the travel industry involved in the rapidly expanding market of international meetings and to exchange actual information related to their operations in this market. This initiative soon proved to have been taken at the right moment: the meeting industry expanded even more rapidly than foreseen. As a result of which representatives from all the various sectors of the meetings industry from all over the world applied for ICCA membership, and the most experienced specialist suppliers.

These original principles of **sharing knowledge** and **building trust** between suppliers and international associations continue to be the corner stone of ICCA today.

ICCA now represents over 1000 companies and organisations in over 90 countries worldwide, representing all services within the meetings industry. We are headquartered in Amsterdam and operate 5 Regional Offices in Africa, Asia Pacific, Middle East, North and Latin America & Caribbean.

International association executives can rely on the ICCA network to find solutions for all their event objectives: venue selection; technical advice; assistance with delegate transportation; full convention planning or ad hoc services. ICCA members represent the top destinations worldwide, and the most experienced specialist suppliers.

Become an ICCA Verified Association through the ICCA Association Portal

Meetings whose details we collect must rotate between at least 3 countries, occur regularly and attract a minimum of 50 participants. If your meeting matches these criteria then you can become one of the ICCA Verified Associations and gain access to ICCA's customised product for Associations - the ICCA Association Portal - a unique online platform providing a safe environment where Association Executives can get in touch with peers and get advice on how to organise efficient meetings.

How can you gain access to the ICCA Association Portal?

Go to the ICCA website <https://portal.iccaworld.org/registrationassociation/> and complete the Association Portal registration form. Please note that this Portal is only open to association executives who meet specific criteria.

This guide is part of a series of publications specifically designed for the international association community to assist them running efficient and effective meetings. If you have any suggestions, would like to see a special topic covered or would like to learn more about the ICCA Association Portal and benefits for association executives please contact Ksenija Polla, CMP at: ksenija.p@iccaworld.org.



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Table of Contents

6

01 Introduction

7

02 What is a Professional Congress Organiser (PCO)?

- 07 2.1 Why use a PCO rather than organising Do-It-Yourself "DIY" events? And how to intergrate PCO services with your own in-house Events Team
- 07 2.2 Services provided by a Professional Congress Organiser
- 08 2.3 Different financial models
- 08 2.4 Contractual relationships
- 09 2.5 Evaluating a PCO

10

03 What is a Destination Management Company (DMC)?

- 10 3.1 Why use a DMC
- 10 3.2 How to choose a DMC
- 11 3.3 What services does a DMC provide?
 - 11 3.3.1 Destination Consultancy
 - 11 3.3.2 Ground Handling

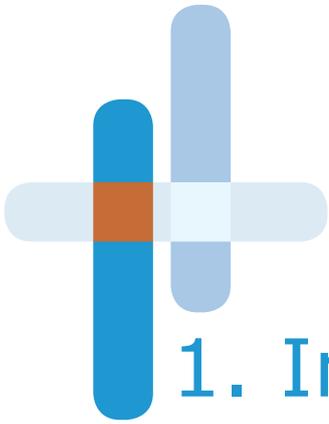
12

04 What is an Association Management Company (AMC)?

- 12 4.1 Why use an AMC?
- 12 4.2 Choosing an AMC
- 13 4.3 Evaluating AMC proposals
- 13 4.4 Contractual relationships
- 14 4.5 Services and AMC offers

15

05 Useful links



1. Introduction

1.1. What are Meetings Management companies?

This publication is designed to help associations understand the differences between Association Management Companies (AMCs), Professional Congress Organisers (PCOs), Destination Managements Companies (DMCs) and other agencies dealing with association meetings, and the many different options for collaborative and contractual relationships.

This publication will introduce different types of event specialists; explain the range of business models and services, and how to find simple solutions in an often complicated market.

The resources provided in this publication will guide you to other associations and organisations, which specialise in each of the specific fields and which can give you more in-depth information on the various event specialists.

Associations should take note that some companies don't easily fit into standard AMC, PCO or DMC definitions, with varying skill-sets and specialist expertise, or very different business models, sometimes because of different country-specific business environments or regulatory requirements.

Also, some companies specialise in providing a range of efficient, good value "commodity" services, whilst others are becoming better known as consultancy partners, or for their technical or production expertise. Some provide the vast range of their services in-house, whilst others are experts in coordinating teams of partner companies.

There exists a perfect partner for every association and its meetings, whether this is an AMC, PCO, DMC or other meetings management company, and this publication is the first step in identifying the ideal match.





2. What is a Professional Congress Organiser (PCO)?

The definition of a Professional Congress Organiser according to the APEX industry glossary by the Convention Industry Council states: "*Professional Congress Organiser. Companies or individuals specialised in organising events on behalf of a client organisation. Not to be confused with Destination Management Company (DMC).*"

The term originated to describe companies, which specialise in organising international congresses, but is now more widely used. Although it is most common for Professional Congress Organisers to organise one-off meetings, a number have positioned themselves as "core-PCOs" and establish a long-term cooperation with associations to take care of their meetings on a more permanent basis.

2.1. Why use a PCO rather than organising Do-It-Yourself "DIY" events? And how to integrate PCO services with your own in-house Events Team

As the definition says, a Professional Congress Organiser (PCO) is specialised in organising meetings. Organising meetings is something a PCO does day in day out; many of the PCOs belong to a trade association or have acquired special meetings accreditation. As this is a specialised field, many top professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and engineers usually make use of the services of a PCO. Unless your association already has a full professional meetings team in-house, you should also entrust the organisation of your meetings to professionals with expertise in planning and administering small to very large congresses.

As the PCO works with many meetings from a wide variety of other association disciplines, they can apply what they have seen work successfully to other associations to your events, which will result in saving you time and money.

PCOs can provide references from other associations whose meetings have similar profiles and needs to your own, so that you can match their areas of expertise to your own requirements.

A PCO has the experience and skills to deal with all challenges and necessary tasks surrounding your meeting, from budget preparation, to venue sourcing, housing, registration, safety issues and much more, and can save you and your team valuable time to concentrate on the core business of your association.

2.2 Services provided by a Professional Congress Organiser

When using a PCO you should clearly define what the PCOs role should be in relation to your own in-house team's tasks? The PCO usually provides:

- Advice and guidance
- Strategic consultancy
- Assisting with bidding process
- Venue selection and negotiation
- Financial management and budgeting
- Tax and exchange rate issues
- Abstract Handling and speaker communications
- Registration and logistics
- Marketing, communication & social media

- Sponsorship and exhibition sales
- Project management
- Technical management (AV, IT, WIFI, etc.)
- Assistance with scientific programme
- Accommodation negotiation and bookings
- Special social events/banqueting/other catering functions
- Risk management & security issues
- Administration of Congress communication
- Onsite communication/delegate Apps etc.
- Ground handling/logistics
- Pre and post tours

Association tasks usually include:

- Programme content
- Selection of keynote speakers
- Topics or themes of abstract
- Compliance
- Lobbying
- Profile Public Relations
- Profit (revenue surplus)

The above is just an indication of the most common division of tasks. In some cases a PCO can take on some of the responsibilities an association would handle itself and vice versa. It is important to understand that every single relationship between an association and a PCO will be specific and based on mutual arrangements best suited for all parties at that time. Those associations with in-house meeting departments may still employ PCOs for events which are larger or more complex than normal, or where they are taking place in unfamiliar countries.

Using a PCO will bring added value to your associations' meeting through:

- Experienced personnel, attention to detail (project managers)

- Relationships with suppliers, venue, hotels
- Time management, specialised software systems
- Creativity + solutions
- Knowledge, know what to do when, calm in crisis
- Budget management and reduced expenditure

2.3 Different financial models:

Depending on the support provided by the PCO, there are various financial models. The most common pricing structures are:

- Fixed management fee
- Management fee per delegate/abstract/square metre of exhibition space
- Percentage of budget
- Profit sharing

It is not unusual that more than one model is used at a time. For in-depth information please review the resources provided in Chapter 5, page 14 of this document.

In some countries the payment of commissions are commonplace for certain PCO and DMC services (i.e. hotel booking services), and it is advisable that associations should request full transparency with regard to a PCO's commission policy.

2.4 Contractual relationships:

The following types of contracts are most commonly used:

- Multi-year contract
- Event-specific contract
- Service-specific contract

For more information and sample templates please check the resources provided in Chapter 5, page 14 of this document.

2.5 Evaluating a PCO

When assessing which PCO to use you will have to consider many factors, here are some suggestions what to evaluate:

- **Track record and references** – when appointing a PCO always ask for a list of current and/or past clients, get the unbiased opinion of one of the other associations who have used or are using the PCO in question.
- **Size/scale of operations** – the size of the operation will have an influence on the scale of services the PCO will be able to offer, if the PCO is a smaller organisation they might not take on the full scale of services a larger operation might. This does not necessarily have an influence on the quality of services, however you simply need to be aware of what you can expect and what not.
- **International scope** – when evaluating the international scope you will be able to distinguish between national operating PCOs; PCOs operating internationally through their own branch offices (multinational companies) and PCOs operating internationally through a network of partners (consortium). The best option for your meeting will depend on your specific needs.
- **Finances** – transparency is an important part for a good long-term relationship. Be sure to ask for financial statements to prove the healthy operation of the PCO of your choice.
- **Membership of industry associations** – ensure to request information on which international associations the PCO is a member of, as this will guarantee that the PCO in question has met certain international standards and quality criteria.
- **Quality Management Systems** – Ask if the PCO has any internationally recognised business certifications or standards.
- **Innovative proposals** – In today's world with fierce competition you will receive highly professional levels of services from most PCOs, however what will distinguish the good PCOs from outstanding PCOs is the level of innovation, creativity and enthusiasm they put in their proposal, and their focus on assisting the association to achieve its own strategic objectives. It will be a sure sign that your meeting can also make the transition from a great to an exceptional meeting.
- **Company Organisation Chart** and specific skills of the personnel in charge of the event – a company organisation chart will provide you with a clear picture that the PCO will be able to provide you with the appropriately skilled staff for all parts of your meeting needed.

For more information and sample templates, please check the resources provided in Chapter 5, p. 14 of this document.





3. What is a Destination Management Company (DMC)?

DMC stands for Destination Management Company. According to the APEX industry glossary by the Convention Industry Council a DMC is: *"A professional services company possessing extensive local knowledge, expertise and resources, specialising in the design and implementation of events, activities, tours, transportation and program logistics."*

The local expertise of a DMC is one of the crucial elements contributing to the success of your meeting! They, in essence know the "how and who" to get business accomplished logistically in your meeting destination.

3.1 Why use a DMC

A DMC is your local expert and has developed a long-standing relationship with the suppliers in the meeting destination, hence saving you time and money in planning your meeting.

3.2 How to choose a DMC?

- **Make sure the DMC is specialised in the destination you intend to use:** The geographical spectrum of a DMC can vary from local to international. Check out the references and examples of client projects on their website to make sure they are knowledgeable about your meeting destination. Ensure they possess the local knowledge you are expecting.
- **Make sure the DMC has experience in the association meetings market:** many DMCs are specialists in corporate meetings or incentive travel programmes, and whilst their core skills may be excellent, it's a good idea to check that your DMC has experience with similar association meetings to your own, and understands your particular business needs.
- **Make a personal phone call**
By making a personal phone call to your DMC you will ensure that there will be no communication challenges and that they are fluent in the language you are operating in. If you require support in any other languages, check that they also have this skill-set amongst their staff.
- **Ask for professional certification and client references**
Depending on the country and specialisation of the agency, specific certifications can highlight the DMC's professionalism. Even if information on certification is readily available on the DMC website, don't hesitate to ask the DMC for client references including phone numbers/email addresses, so that you can verify references.
- **Contact two or three DMCs to get a quote**
Give them of quick brief on your event, and ask for quotation. The Convention Industry Council has created a set of templates you can use for your RFPs (Request for Proposal). A link to the Convention Industry Council and the templates is given in the back of this brochure. The level of detail of the quotations (whether all of your needs have been addressed) and the swiftness of the response will assist you in choosing the right DMC. While it is important to contact more than one DMC for a quote, watch out not to contact too many agencies as this might be equally ineffective as having too few offers.

3.3 What services does a DMC provide?

DMCs provide a variety of services, below is an indication of some of the main services you can expect from a DMC:

3.3.1 Destination Consultancy

- **Destination selection**
The DMC provides advice and information about the chosen destination, the advantages and disadvantages for a specific meetings type, group size, and the level of security, climate and all the local elements contributing to the success of the association's meeting.
- **Matching destination to association objectives**
The DMC, as the local expert, is the insider and in close cooperation with the association selects and matches the destination depending on the association's objectives.
- **Creation and design of meeting**
The DMC creates together with the association the desired theme in and around the meeting, assists with the choice of locations, materials and food, depending on the association's wishes and budget.

3.3.2 Ground Handling

- **Meeting, staging and AV management**
The DMC offers their own AV equipment if available or selects the best local provider that matches the standards expected and budget available.
- **Accommodation**
The DMC acts as a local expert and consultant for accommodation issues providing necessary information, booking system.
- **Welcome, gala and off-site functions**
The DMC acts as local expert and consultant by providing information on prices, discounts, venues etc.
- **Airport transfers and hospitality**
The DMC arranges all necessary transport by land, sea or air in the destination. Some DMCs will own their own fleet of buses and/or cars, while others will know which local providers will best meet the association's needs and budget.

- **Social Programme**
The DMC will carefully tailor the social programme to the needs of the meeting and all delegates, taking into consideration the season, budget and theme of the meeting.
- **Speaker logistics and management**
The DMC provides speaker assistance - from accommodation, transport, social programme and-, tours, etc.
- **Sourcing of local staff**
The DMC sources or outsources local personnel - from multilingual staff to industry experts or amateurs that are familiar with the topic of the meeting.
- **Design and print management**
The DMC assists in or manages the design and printing of all material, respecting the association's standards and gives advice on trends and options. This part is usually outsourced from a local provider, but can also be managed in-house.



4. What is an Association Management Company (AMC)?

An **Association Management Company (AMC)** provides management and specialised administrative services to associations and professional societies of varying sizes and annual budgets. AMCs typically provide strategic planning, financial management, executive management, membership development, marketing and public relations, educational and professional development and meeting and event planning. The AMC is most commonly used for the management of daily issues related to the life of the Association. AMCs sometimes can engage a local PCO or a DMC (according to the services and experience required) for the organisation of congresses and events for the association.

4.1 Why use an AMC?

As most Association Management Companies manage more than one association administration costs become more cost effective. Below are just some of the advantages of using an AMC:

- No need for in-house administration and associated costs
- Professional administration
- Professional accounting
- Latest technology
- Membership services
- Experienced meetings organisation (depending on the region)
- Cross-association knowledge exchange

4.2 Choosing an AMC

Provide the below key components when selecting an AMC:

- Define the organisation's structure
- Provide current budget and financial statements, including most recent audit
- Provide the organisation's By-laws
- Provide the strategic plan, if one exists
- Provide the current number of members and the dues structure
- Provide information on all of your meetings that take place annually, including number of delegates, registration fees, special events, exhibits, etc.
- Provide the current staffing situation and your expectations for staff, especially the chief staff executive (often referred to as the Executive Director of Managing Director)
- Provide a timetable and procedure for the entire process - from proposal through initiation of the contract

Once you receive the proposals keep in mind that all proposals contain proprietary and confidential information and should be shared only with those involved in the decision-making process.

4.3 Evaluating AMC proposals

- **Company/Stability** – How many years has the AMC been in business? Has it had the same ownership? Can they provide solid references from long time clients?
- **Flexibility** – Is the AMC willing to listen and respond to what you need or are they pushing a “full package” that is more than what you need/want?
- **Location** – Does it matter to the client where the AMC is located?
- **Other Clients** – The AMC should provide a list of their current clients or in some cases their client portfolio for the last 5 -10 years. Do you want a firm with expertise in your events industry or just size and scope of events managed?
- **Resources/-Office Facilities** – Location of AMC office(s), convenience to an airport, does the AMC have conference room/resource capabilities for meetings?
- **Equipment** - What type of phone system does the AMC have, does it connect remotely? What Association Management System(s) does the AMC use? What accounting system? Is mobile connectivity provided to staff? How current is their technology?
- **Specialty Divisions** –What divisions does the AMC offer? Full Service, Event & Tradeshow Management, Consulting, Accounting, Marketing, etc.?
- **Staff Number**- How large is the AMC’s current staff? Provide the number broken down by fulltime, part time and contracted or by divisions? How many certifications do the staff carry (e.g. CAE, CMP, etc.)
- **Experience** - How does the AMC’s experience relate to potential client? Have they managed other associations in the same industry, event size, scope, complexity? What industries does the AMC have experience in? Would that experience be beneficial in getting attendees, exhibitors or sponsors?
- **Assignment**- Who/how would the AMC recommend the client service team be structured? How would they oversee the account and how would that breakdown offer complete event management coverage for the client?
- **Proposal/cost**- The AMC should provide the detailed proposal outlining all of the items discussed in this section with a comprehensive outline of the cost associated with management of these items.
- **Terms**- The AMC will state the period of time or scope of work the proposal covers. It should also include the review process as well as the payment schedule.
- **Services**- The AMC should define in the proposal exactly what services will be provided for what fee. The services provided are usually based on the client’s request/needs.
- **References**- The AMC should provide 1–3 references with complete contact information for the potential client to speak to.

4.4 Contractual relationships

In order to develop a solid relationship of trust with the AMC, you should consider the following guidelines:

- Have a written agreement defining the scope of work to be performed, the fees and charges associated with that work, and other obligations and responsibilities of both parties.
- Clarify ownership of all intellectual property, and ensure that your association retains all copyrights, trademarks, trade secrets, or other intellectual property developed for your association.
- The AMC should be recognised as the authorised agent for acting on behalf of the association.
- Specify the duration of your agreement and any renewal/termination provisions.
- As laws differ across jurisdictions, the written agreement should identify the jurisdiction’s laws under which the agreement will be enforced.

4.5 Services an AMC offers

- Strategic planning
- Government relations
- Financial administration
- Membership development
- Meeting & event planning
- Public relations
- Educational programming
- Leadership development
- Marketing communications
- Headquarter infrastructure
- Board / committee support
- Web management
- Organisational development
- Non-dues revenue programs
- Publication management
- Sponsorship development



5. Useful links:

More information on PCOs:

ICCA Meetings Management Sector members: www.iccaworld.org

IAPCO (International Association of Professional Congress Organisers):

www.iapco.org

- provides general PCO information, while the following website gives more specific information/papers on PCOs, Core PCOs, and how to select them, as well as templates on how to submit an RfP for an international meeting: <http://www.iapco.org/publications/white-papers/>

More information on DMCs:

ADME (Association of Destination Management Executives International):

<http://www.adme.org/>

- providing more information on services provided by Destination Management Companies

Convention Industry Council:

- The following link provides you with a RFP template for Destination Management Companies:

http://www.conventionindustry.org/Files/APEX/APEX_Destination_Management_RFP.pdf

More information on AMCs:

ASAE (American Society of Association Executives):

- A comprehensive resource on Association Management Companies www.asaecenter.org and <http://www.asaecenter.org/Resources/EnewsletterArticleDetail.cfm?ItemNumber=5706>

AMCI (AMC Institute):

- A complete reference site of Association Management Companies where Requests for Proposals can be received. Best practices in the field of Association Management www.amcinstitute.org

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