

How to appoint a Professional Conference Organiser (PCO)



Whether you work for a host organisation or local organising committee, chances are you have your own areas of expertise and existing workload. If you lack time, resources and/or technical knowledge related to event management, you may want to appoint a Professional Conference Organiser (PCO). These are companies that specialise in managing conferences and events, who support and work closely with event owners to consider strategy and objectives, provide advice, implement decisions, and manage logistics.

Here are our 10 steps to help you appoint a PCO for your next conference:

1. Confirm roles and responsibilities

Different conferences have different governance and project management models, so it is important to confirm at the outset who will be responsible for each element of delivery. As a first step (and as applicable) work with the international association or organisation that has ongoing custodianship of the conference to understand:

- what they require from you
- port and services they provide to you
- any policies, processes and decision-making powers that may affect how you appoint and partner with a PCO.

2. Identify the preferred event format and scale

In-person meetings remain the most common format for conferences. However, technological advances and programming innovations have created new opportunities to engage delegates. How many people do you want to engage? And do you want your event to be delivered for physical attendees



only, for interactive virtual audiences, or a combination of the two via a hybrid format?

3. Identify required services

You can now assess gaps in resources and technical support – including technology requirements – to identify the services you need from a PCO. This may range from preliminary research on venues and suppliers, budgets and overall project planning, through to marketing and promotion, accommodation, registration, abstract management, programming, and event delivery.

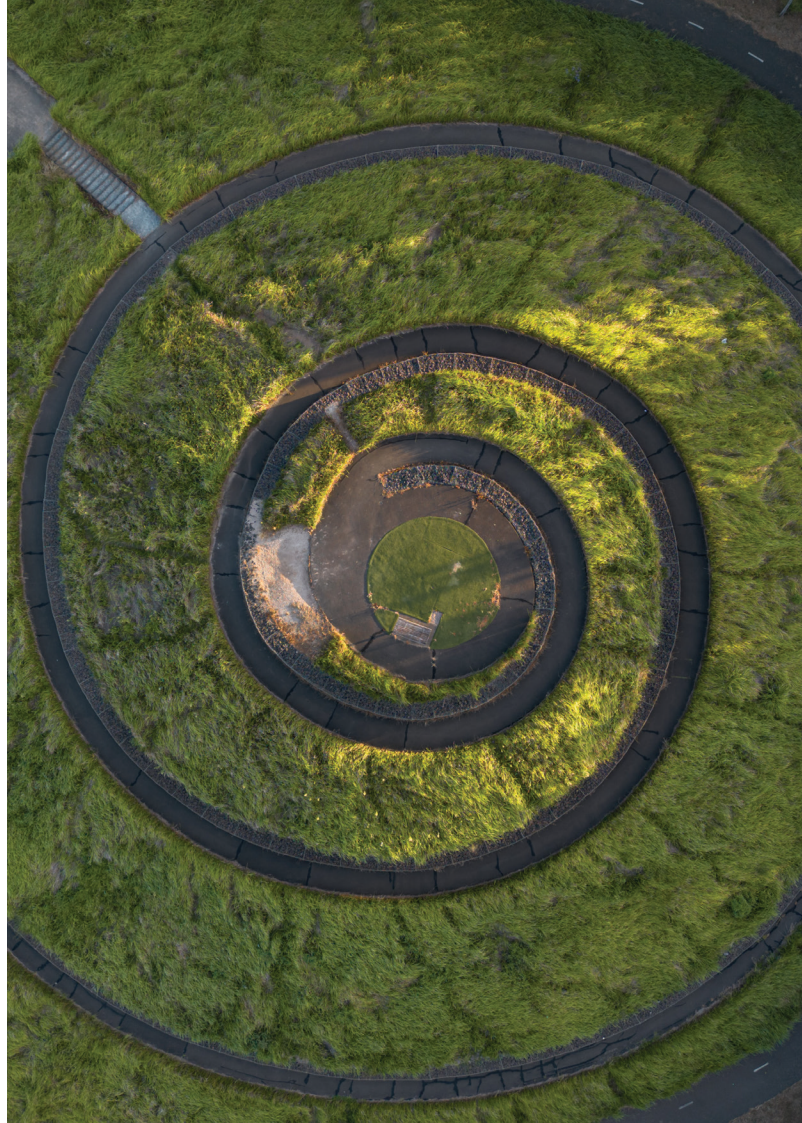
4. Create a Request for Proposals

Based on your assessment and data from previous iterations of the conference, create a Request for Proposals (RfP) that includes:

- general information on the conference and its history, such as event frequency, delegate numbers, and links to previous programs
- information specific to the event you want to host, such as proposed location, duration, schedule, format, venue facilities, registration fees, exhibition, accommodation and technical requirements, and expected roles and responsibilities
- clear instructions for the tender process (for example, you may want to stipulate the format in which you expect to receive proposals and fees, so that you can compare them like-for-like, when the time comes).

5. Shortlist potential PCOs

At this stage, identify PCOs that seem most suited to your needs and compile a contact list. You may want to consider PCOs that have conference management as their core business; proven



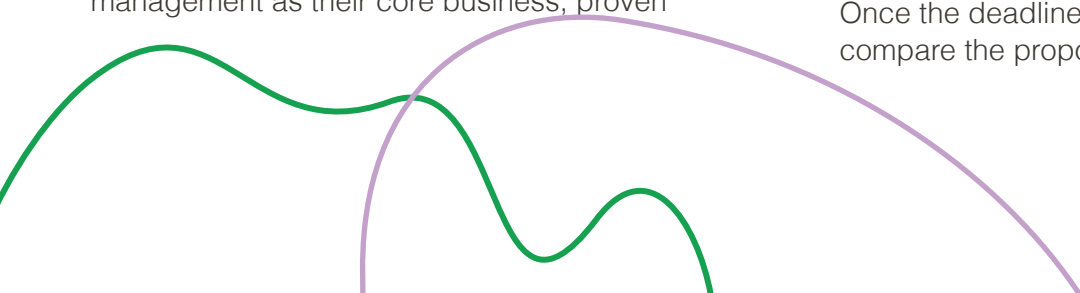
experience with conferences of a similar type, size, and format; a good reputation; and financial and organisational transparency. You can also find information and contact details for [PCOs that operate in Sydney](#) on our website.

6. Distribute your Request for Proposals to shortlisted PCOs

Time the distribution of your request to allow PCOs ample opportunity to review your requirements, gather relevant information, estimate fees, and follow up with any questions (at least three weeks, if possible).

7. Evaluate proposals and check references

Once the deadline has passed, evaluate and compare the proposals. If you provided a



standard format for responses and fees in your RfP, this step should be relatively easy. However, if one PCO seems much cheaper than most or has not made clear what services are included in the quoted fees, do not hesitate to contact them to seek clarification. Once you have a list of prospective PCOs, you can seek references from current and past clients or partner companies, like venues and hotels.

8. Interview prospective PCOs

Once you have identified prospective PCOs, it is standard practice to invite them to make a short presentation to relevant decision makers (20 mins) followed by Q&A (40 mins). This can be done in-person or virtually, but it should be the same for all candidates. This is your chance to discuss PCOs' experience with similar events; their financial and legal position; technological expertise; staff structures and key contacts; governance, finance and risk management frameworks; codes of conduct; sub-contracting arrangements; environmental, corporate and social responsibility policies; reporting relationships; and working practices and processes.

9. Select your PCO

You should now be in a strong position to decide which PCO will be best suited to work with your team and deliver your conference! Give them a call, share the good news, and agree next steps.

10. Contract your PCO and inform unsuccessful tenderers

Put in place a written contract that clearly outlines the services to be provided, as well as roles and responsibilities. Many PCOs will have standard agreements that they can adapt for your purposes, but it is worth engaging a legal representative to review paperwork prior to signing, to ensure that your interests are protected. Once you have both signed and confirmed the agreement, as a courtesy, you may want to inform the remaining candidates that they were unsuccessful.



For more information

<https://www.besydney.com.au>