

# Choosing the Right Destination

**Selecting the right destination for your conference is critical; think of it as your insurance policy. The rationale behind choosing the next conference destination should be a business case. It will protect your association, mitigate risk; may help you reduce costs and ultimately manage all stakeholder expectations. The destination must be appealing, accessible and affordable; this will ultimately drive your delegate numbers.**

Successful management of a conference hinges on the positive feedback received from all stakeholders, whether they are delegates, exhibitors, sponsors, organising committees, accompanying persons or speakers.

Setting up a destination feasibility study is a great way of identifying requirements within your event profile and having a structured approach for destination analysis. The event profile should include the goals and objectives, the attendee demographics, programme content, available budget, available historical data, preferred dates, spacing requirements, housing requirements, range of acceptable rates, catering requirements, size of exhibition and an outline of the preferred social programme, in terms of gala dinners, speaker dinners, partner programmes.

It is advisable to list out what is important to the particular conference, e.g. is it the academic programme? Is it a very social conference? Is there a membership development opportunity? When you have gone through the process of outlining what is important for your conference, you'll be able to make a judgement combining the elements of emotion, economics and strategy in the right order.

**The event profile will make it possible to prepare a short list of destinations for consideration.**

The next step is to create a bid document or request for proposal (RFP). The bid document will outline the meeting specifications, selection procedures and criteria. Ideally this process is handled by a Professional Conference Organiser (PCO) on behalf of the client. Working in close consultation with a PCO with global experience can be invaluable to your decision-making process at this stage. The next step is to send the bid document out to prospective cities, Convention Bureaux or venues as appropriate to the size and nature of the congress.

Creating a feasibility study allows you to qualify the short-listed destinations and helps you create a framework for comparison to match the association's goals and objectives.

A number of resources are available that can offer free and impartial advice to you, whether you are looking for a national destination or you are part of a regional/international committee looking at sourcing international destinations.

- Convention and Visitor Bureaux (CVBs)
- INCON / IAPCO / MPI
- International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA)

The above organisations can be fantastic partners in the destination selection process and can answer many of the questions outlined in the framework and checklist below. They have specific and expert knowledge, and in many cases, tangible support. CVBs usually provide unbiased and free information about local hotels, venues, non-traditional venues and guide you towards an authentic experience in the chosen destination. They can offer invaluable support when making local introductions, e.g. Lord Mayor introduction, government agencies, international airline contacts.

Trade associations such as INCON, ICCA, IAPCO and MPI can also assist with free information and have published specific booklets on topics such as 'Negotiating with Hotels', 'Negotiating with Airlines'.

Trade shows such as IMEX and EIBTM represent useful resources as much time can be saved in collecting information on destinations. You can visit and research the world in just two or three days. MCI Dublin invites groups of clients to IMEX (Frankfurt) and EIBTM (Barcelona) every year as part of their Hosted Buyer Programmes. If this activity is of interest to you, please contact [Colm.mcgahern@mci-group.com](mailto:Colm.mcgahern@mci-group.com) for more information.

See the below template as an example of how to carry out a destination feasibility study. By listing the individual conference and destination requirements and qualifying them by how they can impact on the success of your conference, you can shortlist with confidence and clarity those locations that may be the most suitable for your conference.

After analysing the conference and destination requirements specific to your conference and short listing your final destination choices, a site inspection of those locations and venues therein is always recommended. This is a crucial part of the decision making process and can often be financially supported by the CVB or other partners.

In summation, the destination must be safe, attractive and affordable to attract as many delegates as possible. A partner PCO will provide you with a one-stop-shop approach in terms of streamlining this process and getting the best results to match your expectations no matter where you hold your congress or event.

### Destination Feasibility Study Template

	<b>CONFERENCE REQUIREMENT</b>	<b>HOW THIS WILL IMPACT ON THE SUCCESS OF YOUR CONFERENCE</b>
1	Membership and non member base within the proposed destination / location	This will impact on size of attendance from that county, country or region and is crucial to increasing delegate numbers and revenue for the conference.
2	Possibility of getting local speakers	Local speakers will provide new content; encourage younger delegates to share their science and research. This will also reduce the accommodation and transport costs if they are local.
3	Strength of local committee / Scientific Meetings	The strength of the local committee and a strong Chair are vital to sustaining a healthy and innovative programme of education or science. For scientific meetings, it is necessary to identify national societies or active scientists interested in hosting the congress.
4	Exhibitors and Sponsors	Is there a strong base of potential support in a particular destination over another one? It is important to gauge your potential exhibitor and sponsor feedback about a destination. If they have any concerns about the destination selection, they will not support your conference.
5	Price: Value for Money Ratio	Suitability of venues in relation to capacity, price and experience. There has to be an option that fits to your budget constraints and that matches your event profile. Flexibility and negotiability are two key attributes relevant to supplier management.
6	Venue	Availability and suitability of venues in the city for conferences and off-site functions. The proven track record, professionalism and experience of the staff at all the venues is paramount.

**DESTINATION  
REQUIREMENT**
**HOW THIS WILL IMPACT ON THE SUCCESS OF  
YOUR CONFERENCE**

7	Experience	The destination should have a proven track record of organising association conferences.
8	Destination Appeal	An attractive destination will always encourage better attendance both for delegates, accompanying partners and also importantly for exhibitors and sponsors. Effective Marketing of what can be done in the destination will further enhance delegate numbers.
9	Language Barriers	The lingua franca of conferences is English, however this should not be taken for granted and is a serious consideration. Think of 'lost in translation' and how much time can be added to a management project when working between languages.
10	Time zones	This will impact on the time to deliver and manage the conference. It will effect travel times, accommodation requirements etc. These will affect the bottom line.
11	Access	<p>1. Destination Access: Is the destination easy to get to? What is the flight capacity, average price of a flight and travel time from main European Hubs? Difficult destinations to reach, e.g. with many stopovers will reduce attendance.</p> <p>2. City access: trams, buses, metros, trains – city transport cards and good infrastructure is always a bonus.</p> <p>3. Accessibility for any special requirements such as disabilities may also be a consideration.</p>
12	Telecommunications and Infrastructure	High speed broadband, good connections?
13	Trade Unions/Labour Relations	A high propensity of labour relations and strikes can really sway and affect the outcome of a conference.
14	Currency	Oscillation of currencies always incurs risk, so it's important to keep a close eye on the currency of a destination and hedge your bets.
15	Destination Support	<p>Support in a destination can come in a variety of ways:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Financial: What grants are available in the city if the conference is brought to a particular destination?</li> <li>2. In-Kind Support: Every Destination will differ in what it can offer a conference. Some items that are sometimes available are:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advice on clashing events, festivals, sporting events that might influence hotel and venue prices. Are there dates that should be avoided?</li> <li>- Brochures to promote the destination</li> <li>- Free Maps</li> <li>- Listings on Congress Calendar</li> <li>- Articles and media releases uploaded on the website to further increase search engine optimisation (SEO) of the congress.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

## DESTINATION REQUIREMENT

## HOW THIS WILL IMPACT ON THE SUCCESS OF YOUR CONFERENCE

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Welcome reception sponsored or partly sponsored by the city</li><li>- Reduced priced city transport cards</li><li>- Destinations can often offer support in the form of marketing the conference and this will further enhance the profile of the conference in that destination, which will promote a larger delegate audience.</li></ul>
16	Economic Stability	The Destination must be economically stable.
17	Safety and Security	Is the destination safe? Terrorism, outbreaks of diseases, earthquakes and general delegate safety are paramount for consideration.
18	Medical Facilities	Easy access to hospitals and doctors.
19	Local Staff	Availability of experienced conference hostesses and multi-lingual staff.
20	Customs Regulations	The material, products, stands all need to arrive at the conference destination and venue!
21	Visa Requirements	This varies greatly from one geographic jurisdiction to another.
22	Climate	This may or may not be a factor.
23	Environmental/ CSR Policies	Destinations, venues, hotels, and suppliers – where there is a concentration of best practice, this will help streamline the process of delivering the conference to the best possible standards.
24	Accommodation	Variety, quality and price points of hotels and other types of accommodation appropriate to the socio-economic profile of the delegates.
25	Tourism	Leisure facilities, tour options, shopping, entertainment, a variety of things to do in the destination for partners to encourage pre & post extensions in the destination.
26	Calendar	The conference should avoid clashing with any other conferences within this sector that are competing or directly related. The conference should also avoid all religious and national holidays. The conference should also avoid sell out dates around festivals, concerts & sporting matches. It is also necessary to know what the peak season of the particular destination under scrutiny is.
27	VAT	Up to date information on VAT prevailing rates, any impending changes and the process for VAT reclaim is vital information to have. This can save a lot of money in the conference budget.

For more information on how MCI can be of assistance in choosing the correct destination for your conference or for a copy of this article in pdf please contact:

[Jean.evans@mci-group.com](mailto:Jean.evans@mci-group.com)

T. +353 1 2802641

