

Seven Considerations When Partnering with AMCs

It's not surprising that the number of Association Management Companies has doubled over the past 20 years, according to data collected by the AMC Institute. Mounting business demands leave little free time for association leaders, and volunteers are finding that they can spare less of their work week for nonprofit activities. AMCs can help, either through full-service management for volunteer-managed associations, or by providing specialized services on a project basis.

But how do you go about finding the right AMC? Here are seven key areas to consider:

Leadership

Examine the AMC's level of professionalism. Are the AMC executives proven as effective leaders who are knowledgeable in your industry or profession? Determine what level of executive involvement you will be getting and if the AMC staff has the broad-based experience necessary to assist in strategic planning.

Staff

Be sure the firm is appropriately staffed to serve your organization. What credentials and level of experience does the staff offer? Consider firms with staff that complement the skillsets of your board. It helps if the corporate culture of the AMC is compatible with your organization. Is association management the core business of the firm? Determine the firm's commitment to the association management segment of its business and the staff's level of association expertise.

Scope

AMCs are prepared to provide specialized association services or take over complete operational functions for clients. Which services do you want from an AMC? Establish the extent of services desired early in the process, whether you want full service or specific outsourced services.

Specialization

Does the AMC have specialized experience in the service areas you require? Specialized services might include meetings and exhibitions management, crisis and issues management, government and media relations, membership development, web site development, creative design, technical and scientific research, statistical analysis and reporting, market research and promotion.

Stability

Executive turnover at associations can lead to costly downtime and interruptions in vital operations. Is there an impending turnover at the AMC? If yes, at what level will the turnover occur? Does the AMC have the resources available to effectively deal with the situation if an executive should leave the organization?

Technology

Has the AMC invested in the technology that would best serve your organization? Technology changes every day - make sure the prospective AMC is prepared to adapt. Your organization may benefit from advanced database management systems, web development and maintenance, online meetings and registration, and printing and distribution capabilities. Find out what the AMC has to offer, what kinds of upgrades are available and what they will cost.

Cost-effectiveness

While hiring an AMC is not necessarily less expensive than hiring in-house association staff, some associations find it is a more cost-effective solution when they consider the services that are available to them through an AMC. Has the AMC demonstrated a strong business sense and an ability to adhere to bottomline requirements? Also, when comparing fees and cost estimates from different firms, be sure to identify all components used by the companies in preparing their estimates.