

There is no doubt that, in some form or other, subventions are at work within the association convention community. Even some national governments recognise the necessity of setting something aside to make it easier for a decision maker to choose the 'right' destination.

Little Estonia, new on the international congress radar, has recently announced a subvention scheme to lure international conventions to its emerging Baltic shores. For years, The Netherlands has offered a financial come-on to the not-for-profit market. Many others do so. Some are more generous than others. Is there anything wrong in it?

Association management expert with Intereel in Brussels, Tom Reiser, thinks not.

"I would argue that for an association it is always best to have cash or cash equivalent for expenses that one would have anyway, as it provides the greatest flexibility. A good example would be reductions in convention centre costs. Anything that allows an organisation to make attending its meeting

a kick-back, or a back-hander, but it seems to be an accepted form of incentive and is being used by many convention bureaux or tourism authorities."

Estonia's scheme can cover up to 70 percent of conference costs. Administered by Enterprise Estonia, organisers of large, not-for-profit international conferences in Estonia can have between €19,000 to €64,000 of their event costs reimbursed.

Qualifying criteria require that the event must be international in nature, help raise Estonia's profile, last for at least three days, involve a minimum of 300 overnight stays, and take in local sightseeing.

Funds from the programme must be used for conference-related expenses. Financed by the European Regional Development Fund, it will last through 2011.

In The Netherlands, Eric Bakermans, marketing manager, meetings & conventions



Andrea Bauer
Executive Director, European Association of Nuclear Medicine

amount for the guarantee – 'insurance'."

These days, some kind of subvention for major international conventions is pretty much a foregone conclusion. Of course, some destinations simply can't afford cash, so offer something else in lieu.

"In our RFPs (Request for Proposal) we ask for possible contributions 'in kind or in money' from the city/region/country," reveals Andrea Bauer, executive director at the European Association of Nuclear Medicine. "What we usually get is a reception for the VIPs at the Mayor's office - sometimes very elaborate, sometimes sleazy.

"I believe the matter of subventions is just as non-talked-about in the meetings industry as the subject of commissions, hidden commissions, markups etc..."

Meantime, the unfailingly-open Hungarian Convention Bureau, which launched its Conference Ambassador Program in 2004, believes it has the complete answer.

"It is available for Hungarian associations, organisations, foundations, etc. that are members of an international association," explains director **Dora Kiss**. "They can be

either profit or non-profit organisations.

"The event must have at least 150 participants, 40 per cent from foreign countries. (Because of the financial crisis, this year we have abolished the condition of the number of participants, but this will probably be replaced after the crisis.) Local sightseeing does not have to be involved, either.

"The submission of the tenders is continuous. The deadline for applications is at least two months prior to the presentation."

It does appear that Europe is divided on the question of subventions - at least at national level. Next time, we ask the cities what funds they can offer to international conventions teetering on the brink of a venue decision to help tip the scales... **ami**

subvention [sub•ven ch un]
noun
a grant of money, esp. from a government.

"I believe the matter of subventions is just as non-talked-about in the meetings industry as the subject of commissions, hidden commissions, markups etc..."



more affordable to participants and exhibitors/sponsors is ideal – particularly in economically difficult times."

Hans Friis, technical meetings expert and veteran in the international congress business, likes to call it what it is: "A financial motivator to convince conference managers to use the highest paying destination, some would probably call it

at the Netherlands Board of Tourism & Conventions, outlined his scheme, called the Pre-financing and Guarantee fund. It is open to all conferences which have knowledge sharing as their main aim.

"It's an interest free loan," explains Bakermans, "the other part is an insurance against a sudden drop of delegates which will cause loss of income. There's a maximum of €90,000 for the loan and also the same