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SportsPlanningGuide

GUIDE TO WINNING THE EVENT BID PROCESS

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ABOUT SPORTS PLANNING GUIDE (SPG)

SPG is the sports events industry's most trusted resource. Through the annual SPG magazine and online at SportsPlanningGuide.com we create content focused on best practices from industry leaders and dive deep into sports tourism trends.

To assist tournament planners in finding the perfect location for their next event, Sports Planning Guide has created the largest, most comprehensive guide to sports-friendly destinations with hundreds of tournament-ready facilities able to host events. For more information about SPG, visit our website @ SportsPlanningGuide.com, email Sports@ptmgroups.com or call our office at 630.794.0696. Sports Planning Guide is a Premier Travel Media publication.

INTRODUCTION

Sports tourism has become a major revenue generator in hundreds of cities and towns throughout the United States. Events ranging from Super Bowls and NCAA Final Fours to three-day youth soccer tournaments are in high demand by communities because of the economic impact they produce. This demand has created hundreds of full-staff sports commissions and one-person departments within a chamber of commerce or a convention and visitors bureau.

The supply has grown just as dramatically as the demand. Championship competitions number in the hundreds on amateur and professional levels, and the majority of them are conducted annually in locations that differ each year. The link between the supply and the demand is the bid.

My 40-plus years of experience in event management and operations make me a great proponent of detail management, and I've found that to be just as important when bidding for an event. Having been on the rights holder side of the bid process, I remember well having to eliminate bids because of detail errors. It should not take numerous bids before one learns how to properly submit them. At Sports Planning Guide it is, therefore, our intention to give you some insight into small details that might lead to a successful bid.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bill Hanson is a co-founder of San Antonio Sports, a sports commission which was established in 1984 and which was also a founding member of the National Association of Sports Commissions. Events conducted or supported by SAS have generated over \$450 million in direct visitor expenditures for the city. He is recently retired after 42 years involvement in sports administration and operations. His event management experience includes the sport operations of the AAU Junior Olympic Games, U.S. Olympic Festival and State Games of Texas. He has organized and directed individual competitions for the 1984 and 1996 Olympic Games, Pan American Games, Goodwill Games, professional soccer and numerous NCAA, NGB, local youth competitions and other local events created by San Antonio Sports. Bill is a past chairman of the National Association of Sports Commissions.

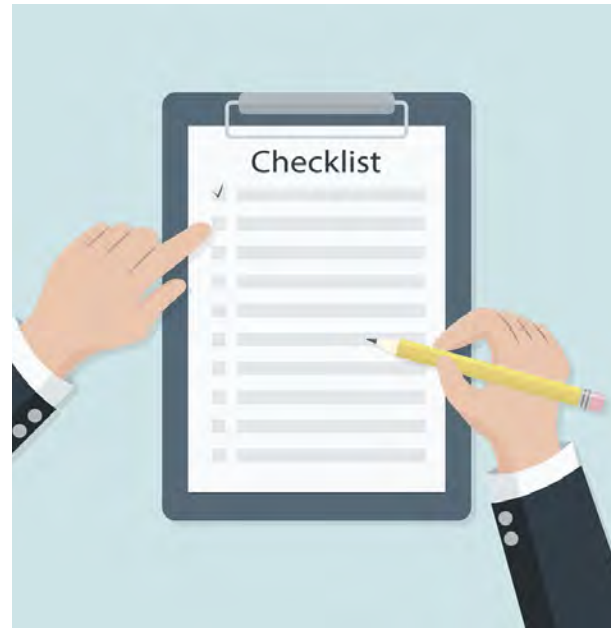
IDENTIFY BASIC NEEDS

Prior to submitting a bid, the Local Organizing Committee (LOC) should have all of its ducks identified and in line, those ducks being a facility, local partners, budget, volunteers and the overall objective of the event. The rights holder's Request for Proposal (RFP) will want very specific information about each of these items.

The LOC must first determine what it wants to gain from the event, such as a big financial return, a large number of heads in beds, or creating a stepping stone to a larger event. Each of these goals will help identify the event facility, and this facility must meet the specifications in the RFP. With these two items identified, it behooves the LOC to research the event and the rights holder of that event. LOCs should understand that bid processes can be political, financial and competitive. A competitive process generally means a level playing field for all bidders, and that the best bid will earn the event. In a financially based process, outstanding facilities may lose to a bid that provides a large amount of money, thus allowing the bidder to "buy" the event. A process may have political influences if the rights holder has some internal connection with a bid city.

First-time bidders should recognize the importance of forming local partnerships, especially if major financing is needed. Sport commissions make it a priority to have good working relations with local businesses, the city/county government, chamber of commerce, convention and visitors bureau and local professional sports teams.

Volunteers are, and likely always will be, the foundation of a competitive event. This is obviously important if the LOC will be conducting the event itself, but can also be a crucial factor in supporting an event that is primarily conducted by the rights holder. Many bid RFPs will have a section that requests the LOC's organizational structure with individual names and will also define the volunteer needs by job area. An LOC bid gains



favor by showing a strong existing volunteer program and the event experience of that program.

Facility and budget should be the most important factors before considering any bid. The competition facility must meet or exceed the specifications in the RFP. Keep in mind that the support facilities are just as important as the competition area. If the facility does not measure up to the specifications, there is no point in making the bid. Likewise with the budget. Again, many RFPs will have a budget format into which the LOC enters its own estimates, but some RFPs have numbers already entered because the rights holder's experience tells him that such an expenditure is necessary. The budget must obviously be favorable and realistic. As with the facility, if the numbers don't look good, don't bid. LOCs must give special attention to a required bid or sanction fee, many times an upfront payment to the rights holder. Some rights holders will require a non-refundable fee just to submit the bid.

DETAILS OF THE BID BOOK



With the aforementioned “ducks in line” and a consensus as to the event(s) to pursue, you now must turn the rights holder’s RFP into a bid book. This book is important not only for your desire to host the event, but also because it is the first impression that the rights holder gets of your LOC. A sloppy book would indicate how you would conduct their event. It must be complete, accurate and, to some extent, attract the attention of the person(s) evaluating it. On the rights holder’s side the bid could be evaluated by a single staff person, or by a committee, and the event itself might attract a large number of bidders. Somehow, yours must stand out.

During my years with San Antonio Sports, we submitted bids for events that ranged from weekend youth tournaments to the Pan American Games, and the books ranged from ten typewritten pages in a loose leaf binder to hundreds of color printed pages in bound book form. In all of the bid processes, the emphasis was on the following points.

ATTENTION TO DETAIL

- **Be Thorough.** Answer all questions and requests completely and briefly. Double check all facts, specifications, measurements and historical data to ensure they are correct. Be sure that you understand fully the RFP. Don't hesitate to ask the rights holder if there's a question.
- **Follow the RFP.** Do not rearrange the sections of the RFP. The rights holder's evaluators will follow the RFP when comparing information, so you don't want them having to skip around in your book looking for it. You may certainly make separate sections, but keep them in the proper order. Put the requested information in its proper place, and do not say "See Attached" and place a brochure or menu in the back of the book. The point here is, don't make them look for the answer or information.
- **Submit a Realistic Budget.** I mentioned this previously but it is a very important section of your bid and you don't want red flags on it. Research all of your costs and avoid too much guesswork. By inquiring into previous events you will get a better idea of revenue estimates. And be sure you understand the rights holder's fees, whether they are upfront payments or based upon attendee or entry fee numbers.
- **Prepare Enhancements.** Simply stated, these are items that save or make money for the rights holder. There will likely be items in the RFP designated as Responsible by Rights Holder, maybe staff hotel rooms, courtesy cars, airline tickets and meals. If it saves them money, they'll notice it.
- **Have a Professional Presentation.** Pay close attention to detail when it comes to typos, photos, a consistent format and missing pages.



- **Be Unique.** Make your book stand out from the others. Use bells and whistles within the RFP guidelines through the use of local flavor, attractive photos and binding, and clever packaging.
- **Present One Package.** This really means to get all information together for one submission. Avoid a follow-up mailing of a missing item, and make sure that all items in the binder are secured. Keep in mind that an overfilled package or binder can come apart in shipping.
- **Meet Deadlines.** Don't miss the submission deadline and expect to be in consideration. Prepare a feasible timeline for producing your bid. Complex bid books need lots of time and should have the input of numerous experts, especially if editorial, pictures, diagrams, letters of support, printing and binding are needed. Hand delivery of major bids is preferred, and it adds a personal touch to the process. If you're mailing numerous books, mail multiple packages to ensure meeting the deadline, and try to allow 1-2 extra days. Definitely confirm receipt of the books by the rights holder.

THE SUCCESSFUL SITE VISIT



It'll be music to your ears when you hear "We'd like to do a site visit." Regardless of your competition for this event, your bid book has accomplished its task and prompted the rights holder to learn more about your LOC and facility. The site visit is much more than a grip-and-grin function, and close attention to detail is important for all of these points.

- **Demonstration of “Can-Do” Attitude.** The overall conduct of the entire site visit is the best indication to the rights holder as to how you will conduct his event. You will most likely be given the itinerary for the visit, from arrival to departure, and it’s up to you to fulfill it completely and efficiently.
- **Information from Delegates.** Make sure that you fully understand the guidelines of the visit. What specifics do they want? Is there time for shopping or free time? Find out who the delegate(s) will be and get some personal information on them. Do they have special needs (smoking hotel room, dietary, medical, disabled), hobbies and interests? Do they drink alcohol? Above all, your LOC should be well informed about the sport and the event.
- **Flexible Itinerary.** Just as it is when conducting an event, you must be ready to adjust quickly due to a request or an incident. How you handle an ordinary traffic jam is important and will be noticed. You should have time to see all of a venue, but be prepared not to. The use of forerunners and chase cars is always a good move when having to see several facilities.
- **Use the potential HQ Hotel.** As the hotel will likely provide more than sleeping rooms for the event, their staff should be well-involved in the visit and informed about the event. Welcome gifts and special amenities should be provided, and key staff present where needed.
- **Facilities Prepared.** When visiting the competition facility, it is always helpful to have an event in progress, and even more helpful to have the same type of event in action. If that is not possible, then you should avoid a “dead” atmosphere by having videos, music and signage. The facility must certainly be clean and key staff present to conduct the tour. This sounds so obvious, but you don’t want to experience the feeling of getting to a venue with a locked door or gate and no one there.



- **Effective Presentations.** Your presenters should cover the subject quickly and efficiently, answer all questions or get the answers quickly. Do not let them leave without an answer.
- **Present the Local Organizing Committee.** The LOC person who will be the primary contact with the rights holder should be present at all times, as that is the most important relationship of the event. The diversity of the LOC is important, as is encouraging personal relationships with the delegates. Pairing LOC with delegates with similar interests is preferable, and there should be a general emphasis on the expertise of LOC members, such as sport, security, medical, etc.
- **Present Community Support.** The bigger the event you’re pursuing, the more important it is to demonstrate your community’s support for it. Use every opportunity, especially meals and receptions, to introduce representatives of local government, military, corporate, chambers, etc. Community rallies may be appropriate in some cases. If the itinerary allows, work in some local cultural sites so that they get some flavor of the host community.
- **Be Unique.** Many rights holders have specific guidelines regarding gifts for their delegates, but the creativity of the LOC should be used to do something unique that will impress them, or at least get their attention and set you apart from your competitors.

Bid processes for some major events, such as NCAA Final Four, will include a final presentation in the rights holder’s city, thus requiring an additional round of videos, speakers and visuals.

All of the suggestions mentioned will not replace the experience gained from writing numerous bids and organizing successful site visits, but they can certainly be a benefit to the first-time and/or small-shop bidder. In the long run, it’s all in the details.

DO'S AND DON'TS OF WINNING MORE AAU BUSINESS

We talked with top AAU planners about what they look for and avoid when working with CVBs and Sports Commissions. Here are the results.

5 Things They Look For

- 1 Decent selection of hotels at an affordable rate
- 2 Nearby attractions (e.g. a beach or amusement park), perhaps where we can host an event pre-party
- 3 Wide selection of family/team-friendly restaurants and entertainment (e.g. movies, putt-putt, mall, etc.)
- 4 Ideally a venue that has some marketing appeal (e.g. a current or former MLB Spring Training venue). Basically we advertise as "play where the pros play."
- 5 In the perfect world, we hope to find a CVB/SC that is willing to help offset some costs (e.g. by offering a grant)

5 Deal-Breakers

- 1 Traffic (long commute to venue)
- 2 Not enough variety of hotels (from both a quality and price standpoint)
- 3 Unenthusiastic CVB (need to see some excitement from them about hosting our event – we like to feel like we're wanted instead of just "ok you can have your event here")
- 4 Uncooperative venue staff (e.g. experiencing in-event surprises such as an unwillingness to turn lights on in the event rain causes games to be pushed to nighttime)
- 5 When a second party insists on a stay to play (ok if we suggest this model, but we don't particularly like to be forced into it)



DON'T BE ANTI-SOCIAL.

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