

INTRODUCTION

This guidance note does not refer to “internal” award schemes run by many associations. Categories for these type of awards might include: -

- Student of the Year
- Best magazine article
- Long service or special recognition awards

The guidance note seeks to address issues arising from larger scale awards programmes and ceremonies whether or not they may be designed to return a financial income to the association.

PARTNERSHIP OR DIY

There are basically two models for running these types of award schemes:-

1. A partnership with a commercial organising company which may or may not return income to the association.
2. The go it alone’ approach where the association runs the whole awards process from initial marketing to awards ceremony.

What follows is a discussion of issues which associations should consider if adopting either model.

FINANCIAL RISK

This may be alleviated (possibly completely depending on contractual arrangements) if the partnership approach is adopted. However most award partnerships factor in marketing, promotion and judging so, at a minimum, these costs need to be factored in by the association.

If adopting the DIY approach, then the financial risk can be considerable. A rough estimate is that it can take 3-4 years before an association would begin to see a return on its financial investment into an awards scheme. The risk to the members’ money must be balanced against the carefully considered benefits of the scheme.

Awards schemes do however present opportunities to garner commercial sponsorship.

ASSOCIATION AWARDS SCHEMES

Professional Guidance: Events 1

Original Publication Date: October 2016©

HARD WORK

The commitment of resources to an awards scheme in the “DIY approach” should not be underestimated. Depending on the scale and complexity the drain on staff time may be considerable. Again this has to be balanced against the perceived benefits.

Clearly the partnership approach removes the greater proportion of this commitment with the organisation taking on the bulk of the work. There will still be a requirement by the association to fulfil whatever obligations it may have arising from the partnership arrangements.

It should always be borne in mind that awards are not a one-off. They have to be run on a regular basis and the resource commitment is not one that will go away.

REPUTATION

A well organised, respected and prestigious awards scheme can greatly enhance the standing and status of an association. It can demonstrate the high standards propounded by the association and, by implication, those of its members and entrants to the scheme. It is important that this element of awards is widely promulgated to the wider world. There are many examples of awards schemes which are too inwardly focused and become essentially grand industry parties. Fine in themselves but not promoting success beyond the sector itself.

ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The judging process for awards can be a minefield and cause reputational damage to an association. Commercial sponsors of award categories who go on to win an award are an obvious target for the cynical and those who didn't win. It can be very easy for awards schemes to lose credibility and this should be born in mind especially if awards are organised directly by the association. Accusations of “cronyism” are not uncommon!

Conversely a robust assessment process carried out by independent judges can and do present that essential credibility to awards which is essential. Getting the “great and the good” involved in judging lends itself to establishing the awards as something meaningful.

Great care should be taken in devising the awards categories. In a smaller sector it is dangerous to introduce for example ‘Contractor of the Year’. It is often not long before the phrase “Whose turn is it this year?” is heard!

OTHER FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Should the awards be open only to members? Probably not as the scheme will not necessarily be seen as promoting excellence from within the whole sector. Entries from non-members do, of course, also present recruitment opportunities.

It is important to control the awards and association brand. These tend to get widely used in all sorts of places during the awards process and will be used by entrants and later on by the winners. Ensure that all participants are aware of what they can and can't do with the branding; especially with your logo.

It can be time well spent to prepare a short guide to the process; it could save a lot of difficulty later on.

Will winners become advocates for the association? Possibly. Winners will clearly wish to promote their success and the association may benefit from the reflected glow. Balanced against that must be the self-interest of those who compete for the awards. The best interests of the association will not be a driving factor.

Entertainment is expected as part of most awards ceremonies. Most association managers know that whatever entertainment is provided will not appeal to everyone! Worse still it can go badly wrong if it is seriously mismatched. A rugby club comedian may not be the best awards presenter! Any PR benefit and reputational gain can be quickly wiped out by a poor choice and it will be the only thing which people will remember.

THE LONG TERM

Whether in partnership or going it alone awards are a long-term investment. Therefore, the same old format cannot be repeated year on year. There is a constant need to refresh. This may involve reviewing categories, changing venues and appointing new judges. The resource commitment to this should not be underestimated.