

NFTHD #76: Tricky venue decisions: some thoughts to help shape your decisions...

In this Help Desk Note, we focus on the tricky decisions involved in venue selection. While we aim to align with the Code and industry expectations, choosing an appropriate venue isn't always straightforward. Each company's risk appetite and comfort level will differ, so we've outlined key considerations to help guide your decision-making process.

Trickier dilemmas require some thought. Here are some considerations you may find useful when considering when deciding on venues:

- **Leisure by association?** If the venue is known for its entertainment, leisure, or sport, ask if there will be any of those activities occurring during the time of the event. Is the venue capitalising on that activity or is the venue being used solely as an appropriate venue?
- **Resort status?** Usually a red flag, but worth probing. There are large amounts of self-proclaimed resorts located regionally that might not hold the bells and whistles one may expect of a resort and may be an appropriate venue choice, especially given the alternatives. Another consideration could be to check out how the venue markets itself – check out their social media channels and website. If they are synonymous with luxury/boutique/high-end branding, then potentially the decision is easier to make.
- **Proximity to audience?** Choose a venue that is proximate to the majority of your audience. Because the primary intent is to enhance medical knowledge and support the QUM, it becomes very hard to justify choosing locations that are not close and require the majority of the audience to significantly travel, especially if that region is known as a tourist drawcard.
- **Are hatted restaurants a problem?** Just like any venue, if they become the drawcard, and it is marketed that way, then yes. But it doesn't mean we should exclude high-quality hospitality; rather, we should consider opulence, cost, and whether the hospitality provided is commensurate with the education being offered. Anything that makes a venue renowned runs a 'perception risk', but it doesn't automatically exclude them.

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Finalising your decision:

- **Perception and optics...** always important. A venue may fit all the 'Code criteria' but still fail the pub-test in terms of the event or venue being perceived by others as indulgent and possibly inappropriately influencing our valued healthcare professionals. The reputation of industry is critical and this is where perception plays an important part. How one perceives an event will vary from person to person; it makes it tricky because the concept is subjective and not binary. So, how to gauge this? (see next dot point)
- **Ask others...** Run an informal poll by asking your fellow peers how they would understand the event. Asking your colleagues will help you gauge the likelihood of whether your choice is consistent with industry expectations. But don't stop there; consider asking your family, friends to get the non-industry lay-person perspective.
- **Consider worst-case scenario...** How would it be reported in media such as a Four Corners report, or a Daily Telegraph exposé? The event might have a hugely significant and robust educational agenda – but it is less likely a media report would highlight the whole picture. Use this as a yardstick to gauge how comfortable you are with your decisions, so you can stand by them should that worst-case scenario occur.
- **Document your rationale...** Ensure your research and rationale are documented. Go beyond the box-ticking. For the trickier decisions, make an effort to document how and why you have made that choice, and record what due diligence has been taken. This documentation will assist you if you are in a position to defend your decision and allow you to demonstrate how you used the Code and ethics to inform your choices.
- **Have an exit strategy...** which is basically part of any risk mitigation approach. If the event doesn't go as planned, and on the day it becomes clear that it wouldn't likely align with your expectations, then pre-think about how you can withdraw, or draw the line if it needs to be drawn. This might mean your personnel depart at a pre-determined time, or it may be appropriate to separate the components of an event that you support which align with industry values.

It is clear that our approaches may differ slightly if the event is company-initiated, or if we are supporting an independent educational event organised by others, and the Code acknowledges this somewhat. Whilst we need to be assured that our sponsorship dollars uphold the standards we can accept for ourselves, we also acknowledge the level of involvement the company has in the development of the activity will guide their responsibility for compliance with the Code.

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