

# Can a CC Contribute to Member Value of Associations?

BY JULIANNE JAMMERS, SWISSTECH CONVENTION CENTER, LAUSANNE, SWITZERLAND



➔ At the heart of the associations value proposition is networking and professional development, and the benefits of these two features are the often the strength of the membership. Meetings have long been the delivery method for these interactions. To some extent, the internet has disrupted the meeting business by providing an alternative method to accessing these features through webinars, open online courses and networking platforms. Arguably, it has also provided a solution for the environment concerns, cost and hassle of travel. But no matter how good technology is or gets, physical meetings still matter.

So while conferences remain a pillar of the association business, the reality is that they need new and innovative ways to deliver bottom-line value in their meetings—and they have to be more creative than ever before in how they do that.

At the SwissTech Convention Center, we offer that creative approach in acting as a partner to their program development—not just a venue. We collaborate closely with associations to provide an educational environment, develop new contacts and deliver an overall unique member experience.

## Unique Value for Associations

Many would argue that the role of a convention center is to provide excellence in facility and conference management and ensure that their destination is top of mind for the “after-hour” activities. At the university-based SwissTech CC, on the banks of Lake Geneva, we have developed our USP beyond just these arguably critical elements. We play an active role in providing access to knowledge and talent to associations in relevant fields.

With more than 350 laboratories and research groups on campus, the EPFL (Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne) is one of the world’s most innovative and productive scientific institutions. Dozens of start-ups and multi-nationals on the campus and in the area complement the university environment, and the convention center is an exceptional place to meet and exchange ideas.

On the one hand, we actively identify relevant associations that can benefit from close cooperation with the experts—some of the world’s most respected scientists located on our campus—in the development of their programs. Complementing this, our active outreach to our professors,

who are members of numerous associations, allows us to help make likely matches with the aim of creating meetings that have unique and lasting value.

Integrating students of all levels from bachelor to doctoral programs into the meetings, both as a resource for delivery but also as participants, provides associations access to their future members. We have helped to create special networking sessions—a kind of “speed-dating”—to encourage and create those serendipitous moments where relationships can form.

Alliances that support convention centers’ strengths can make a difference for associations in their quest to identify appropriate venues that can offer additional value. The SwissTech recently became a member of the Energy Cities Alliance—a select group of destinations with significant energy economies—with the intent to attract energy-related association meetings. While our destination is not considered an energy city, as a knowledge and research partner (thanks to our location on the EPFL campus), we can offer associations access to the expertise in both traditional energy solutions and sustainable energy that is a strong offering on the EPFL campus.

## Value for Association Sponsors & Exhibitors

Not only do associations have direct access to knowledge and student talent, but this access can be a compelling incentive for association meeting partners and supporters from industry. What better place to hunt for talent than during an event of like-minded folks under a single roof? Industry spends significant time and money in recruiting and associations have an excellent opportunity to position their meetings as a credible platform for complementing this effort.

CCs can play an important role in bringing more value to associations by looking at what they and their community can offer beyond location, rooms and venue. Conventions closely relate to industries and tend to look for venues where those industries are located. The same case can be made for associations. By targeting those associations that match up with local, regional or national economic strengths and creating opportunities to access the knowledge in the economy, convention centers can create a win-win for all of their stakeholders. ☺

*In addition to her role as AIPC board member, Julianne Jammers is managing director at the SwissTech CC in Lausanne, Switzerland.*