

CONFERENCE SPONSORSHIP POLICY

January 2015

1 PURPOSE OF THIS POLICY

This document sets out the circumstances in which FCA will accept sponsorship from industry, EDR schemes, government or other organisations to go toward the costs of staging annual conferences or similar events.

2 BACKGROUND

External sponsorship raises the potential for conflicts of interest

Annual conferences and similar events organised by the State and Territory financial counselling associations and FCA are important opportunities for financial counsellors to share information and new ideas, access training and network. However, the sector is chronically under-funded and the cost of staging these events is significant. Many financial counsellors would not be able to attend without access to subsidies to reduce registration fees to affordable levels or to cover the costs of accommodation or travel.

External sponsorship is one way in which the financial counselling sector has been able to provide these subsidies to keep the costs of conferences to a reasonable level. However, it is absolutely vital that external sponsorship is managed in a way consistent with the values of the financial counselling profession.

One of these values is independence. Financial counsellors must always act in the best interests of their client, and no one else's. Financial counselling associations and FCA also represent consumer interests more broadly at a policy level. The issue is that sponsorship from external parties that financial counsellors deal with either in their day-to-day casework or that State/Territory associations and FCA deal with at a policy level, could raise the perception or the possibility of conflicts of interest.

For these reasons, where funds or other resources are offered by industry, State and Territory financial counselling associations and FCA will only accept these funds within guidelines designed to protect and ensure our independence.

Why external sponsors are involved

Many potential conference sponsors understand the resource constraints facing the financial counselling sector. Sponsorship is one tangible way that external organisation can therefore make a contribution to address these constraints.

The work undertaken by financial counsellors can also benefit external parties directly, for example, if a financial counsellor helps a client to negotiate a payment arrangement. Creditors may benefit. Conference sponsorship is one way of acknowledging this.

3 POLICY

State and Territory associations and FCA (“we” or “us”) will accept sponsorship from external parties (“the sponsor”) in a manner that preserves the independence, integrity and philosophy of financial counselling and consumer advocacy.

Activities

We will decide, in consultation with the sponsor, what activities are carried out using the sponsorship resources.

Presentations at Conferences

It may be the case that representatives from a sponsor’s organisation are invited to be presenters at the conference. However, the negotiation of a sponsorship and the sponsor’s involvement as a presenter at a conference are separate issues. Sponsorship that is contingent on the sponsor being included as a speaker or presenter in the conference program will be refused.

Transparency

We will never accept sponsorship of events on the basis that the sponsorship is not disclosed.

Acknowledgement

We will acknowledge the sponsor’s contribution. This will be negotiated with each sponsor but would usually include public acknowledgement in the conference itself and in the conference program.

The inclusion of sponsor company logos in conference programs, slides or backdrops is a recognition of financial support, not an endorsement of the company.

Inappropriate sponsorships

We will not accept sponsorship from organisations that have business activities, products or marketing that in our view are detrimental to consumers. One example would be sponsorship from a payday lending company.

Conditions

The sponsor will not attempt to dissuade us from any action, negotiation or public comment or offer any inducement to do or say anything whatsoever.

We will not endorse specific products of the sponsor or the general business activities of the sponsor. The sponsor will not use the sponsorship of an event to suggest this is the case.