



When to Use a Consultant for your AMC Search

As a volunteer leader of your association or professional society, you understand that good management is critical to your organization's growth and success. That's why your organization chose an association management company (AMC) to drive its mission and strategies, represent its interests and efficiently manage its operations, while leaving its volunteer board of directors to make high level decisions and policy.

The benefits of being managed by an AMC are many, but because boards change over time, it is essential to continually educate volunteer leaders as to their organization's partnership and the terms of its agreement with its AMC. If this isn't done, all it takes is one uninformed or disgruntled volunteer to plant seeds of doubt about the relationship.

Here are just a few examples of some situations that may warrant a third-party consultant:

- A board member convinces the board it should do "due diligence" by seeking bids from other AMCs by issuing a request for proposals.
- The association is on a rapid growth path, and the board questions whether its AMC has the capability and resources to handle its needs.
- The board questions its AMC's fees and billing practices and wonders whether they were common among other AMCs.
- The AMC hasn't demonstrated to the board's satisfaction its ability to provide the services the association requires and the board considers seeking another management solution.
- The board worries about what it feels is excessive turnover on the AMC staff and wonders if it was time to look for a new AMC.

When a situation like any of these occurs, it's time to consider engaging a third-party consultant to assess the situation before making any radical moves that fatally damage the relationship. Frequently, opening up the lines of communication between the Board and the existing AMC leadership can effectively resolve the situation and/or provide a forward path that benefits all parties. It is advisable to select an unbiased consultant who thoroughly understands associations and the AMC model.

You can find qualified consultants by asking for referrals from your organization's attorney, from the AMC Institute, and from the American Society of Association Executives. Interview the consultants by phone, and be sure to ask for and check references, so you can choose a consultant who has handled situations similar to yours.

Changes in management are traumatic for organizations, and cost time, money, energy and focus. A typical search and transition can take 12-16 months. Isn't it worth the investment to determine if your existing relationship can be improved before launching a new search?