

Developing Innovative Programs in Partnership with your Sponsor

A strong sponsor is invaluable to a committee's success. The most successful relationships involve consistent, open communication, accountability, recognition, and a plan. Sponsors are also your greatest allies to help you create quality programs throughout the year and during the ACC Annual Meeting. They are also a great resource for ongoing programming, but you don't need to just work with your primary sponsor to create WOW events.

1. Review the Network Sponsorship Agreement, but remain flexible with regard to hosting events off schedule and in person, and accepting quality resources that don't prescribe to the formats below. Most sponsors follow a specific plan, but sponsorship obligations are negotiable. Typical options include: one top ten, one quick counsel; two webcasts and an InfoPAK or three webcasts; three legal quick hits (LQH) – minimum; and 10 sample forms/policies. Note that while most networks have a primary sponsor, you are able to work with different sponsors for up to 8 monthly programs.

Build a rough resource and program production schedule with your sponsor. While this plan can evolve throughout the year, networks that have encouraged steady resource production and created a loose program schedule experience higher attendance on monthly calls and are able to recruit in-house co-faculty more easily. Early planning allows more time for marketing, and more robust member engagement.

And don't forget to be creative, and not be afraid to have fun. Some of the best programs held throughout the year are virtual roundtable programs with lots of Q&A or collaboration programs between multiple networks. Also, in the past, the Law Department Management Network has a lot of success promoting followership and engagement with its In the Lead YouTube Channel, and hosting interactive games at the ACC Annual Meeting.

2. Get to know your sponsor network representatives well.
 - a. Host an initial call or meeting to find out the sponsor's ideas, goals and depth of expertise. Invite sponsors to join either the leadership call, or separate calls hosted between the chair, or designee and the sponsor contact. The Small Law Department (SLDN) Network leadership holds a bi-annual in-person planning session with its sponsor to develop plans to meet mutual goals. The Health Law Network hosts a similar meeting at the ACC Annual Meeting. The meeting helps keep both parties aligned and moving forward with a common vision.
 - b. Whenever possible, work with both a marketing contact and a partner or associate contact at the firm. Both positions are valuable contacts and enhance the relationship and ultimate success of the committee. The Law Department Management Network uses its Chair, Vice-Chair, Programs Chair(s) and Communications Chair(s) as collective primary points of contact with its sponsor firm's marketing representative and partner.
 - c. Develop talking points on the value of the network that your sponsor can share with their other in-house clients.
 - d. Ask about events that the sponsor hosts outside of its network sponsorship. The SLDN invites the chair to its Annual Meeting. The Employment and Labor Network sponsor invites its chair and ACC sponsor contacts to its annual conference for in-house counsel, and offers a free display table.
3. Manage expectations.
 - a. Make the following decisions with your leadership team.
 - i. Does the leadership team want to have the sponsor participate on all monthly calls, or only on calls when the sponsor presents a topic?

- ii. Does the leadership team want to invite the sponsor to join some and/or all of the executive leadership calls? Sponsors and leaders have commented that including the sponsor on monthly or quarterly leadership calls leads to a more successful relationship and greater accountability. It helps the sponsor feel truly part of the team. But if the network does a lot of pre-planning and discussion of how to involve the sponsor (or other parties) in various opportunities, you may want to have separate calls with the sponsor.
 - b. Share these decisions with the sponsor to ensure transparency.
- 4. Establish a regular plan and schedule for communication, reprioritizing efforts, etc.
 - a. In addition to regular check in calls, after resources are published and programs are hosted, the sponsor should have an opportunity to provide feedback to the network on the process to discuss what improvements can be made.
 - b. Remind your sponsors to check the sponsorship portal to review download numbers on resources and log in numbers for legal quick hit and webcast presentations.
 - c. Successful network sponsor relationships foster open and transparent communication. Check in with your staff liaison often regarding any issues that should be addressed by the liaison. Subcommittee chairs should be encouraged to reach out to their sponsor contacts, holding them accountable for contract deliverables, and other network obligations to which they have committed.
- 5. Encourage your sponsor to leverage other opportunities outside of the committee sponsorship agreement.
 - a. Several network sponsors, including the International Legal Affairs Network sponsors Primerus, provide educational opportunities to non-US members by hosting webcasts, held at convenient times for members based in the EMEA and APAC regions.
 - b. Some network work with their sponsor to host meetings to bring industry in-house counsel and regulators today in D.C. to enhance relationships and provide the opportunity for in-house counsel to advise regulators on the realities of business. The IT, Privacy and eCommerce Network, the IP Network, and the Employment and Labor Network routinely host these meetings with the appropriate regulatory agency. Additionally, many networks hosts local events in key regions where the network has a strong membership.
 - c. Some networks share member Community questions (anonymously) with its sponsor and offer to post any sponsor answers to the entire Community. It's a great opportunity for additional exposure for the sponsor and free advice for your members.
 - d. The Employment and Labor Network prepared table topics at its most recent business meeting, and asked its sponsor to moderate the discussions at each table. The Law Department Management Network sponsor provides links or book recommendations at each monthly member meeting for interesting content relating to its goals, which members find bite-size and useful.
- 6. Recognize your sponsor for their efforts by considering the following:
 - a. Encourage sponsors to write an article for your newsletter.
 - b. Announce new resources on monthly calls, in Community postings, and in newsletters/monthly president's messages.
 - c. Publically thank sponsors and comment on resources published during monthly calls.
 - d. Encourage sponsors to provide comments during the annual NetConnect meetings.
 - e. Submit your sponsor for the annual Network Sponsor the Year Award.
 - f. Reach out to the firm's management to thank them for their support.

You can never thank your sponsor enough, and that thanks goes a long way when you have the few moments come up where you need to provide constructive feedback or course correct.

To enhance programming, many networks have tried the following:

1. Try engaging multiple leaders to build out your programming schedule. The WITH Network uses its committees to drive programs on designated topics, so instead of 1 or 2 folks coordinating programs, you have the benefit of 4 or 5 leaders in charge of specific program initiatives.
2. Think Series. Some of the most exciting programs build upon topics or go deep on a specific topic. Ex. Project Innocence, Contracts Masterclass.
3. Be practical. Practical takeaways separate ACC programming from other organizations. Ensure you are always providing the practical perspective and showcasing in-house counsel speakers.
4. Don't miss an opportunity to leverage important days for network programs. Ex. International Women's Day, Data Privacy Day.
5. To support ACC's strategic plan, many networks added a networking component to their LQH's or offered exclusive networking only events focused around different themes.
6. Working with local chapters is always a great idea especially if you have a chapter board member on your network.
7. Don't miss opportunities to collaborate with other networks and also ensure your sponsors are sharing events they are supporting in local chapters.
8. Where applicable, think about where your network topic could work as a program outside the United States. Many networks host programs specifically designed for audiences in the APAC and EMEA region.

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