

## WFSJ Event Guidelines

### Choosing and Communicating with Prospective Sponsors

The World Federation of Science Journalists (WFSJ) develops a number of different events, most prominently the World Conference of Science Journalists (WCSJ), which is a joint effort with a host organization that includes at least one of the WFSJ member associations. Although the different stakeholders in these shared ventures have distinct interests, they all have a common interest in fundraising. More specifically, they must have a carefully defined approach to the type of sponsorships that will be sought and accepted.

Depending on the location and structure of any given event, various opportunities for sponsorship will exist as part of field trips, receptions, networking, social events, and infrastructure. These guidelines will help organizers define and preserve the underlying character of the event, which will be rooted in principles of science journalism that will ultimately determine the nature of acceptable sponsorship.

Any meeting imbued with a journalistic purpose and culture must avoid these sponsorship compromises:

- giving the impression that a sponsor might be able to buy influence over the content or reporting of the meeting
- divulging the content of the meeting program to sponsors before it is finalized and made public
- creating situations where attendees will be forced to listen to pitches from sponsors

The WFSJ insists on devoting special attention to **corporate sponsors and interest groups**, who often prefer "pay to play" arrangements set according to their own terms. When evaluating the feasibility of such sponsors, two specific questions should be asked:

1) Does the company/organization have a history of working against facts, science, and journalism? For example, the histories of tobacco companies and major oil and gas producers reveal regular distortions and manipulation of facts to serve vested interests. Similarly, many food or pharmaceutical firms have wielded misinformation or disinformation to dodge their association with major public health problems such as opioid addiction, obesity, and the rising prevalence of diabetes.

2. Does the company/organization unethically exploit the Global South? Many firms have brought environmental devastation to this part of the world in order to maximize their profit-making potential at the expense of local populations. Given the significant portion of the WFSJ membership-based in countries that have been so negatively affected, taking on such sponsors poses a reputational risk that can undermine the organization's moral credibility.



Although some examples of unwelcome corporate sponsors are clear-cut, others are less so. For such sponsors, and indeed any sponsor, their role in an event must be transparently presented to one and all. **Sponsored activities or products must be labelled as such**, with any potentially problematic organizations being kept away from the most prominent parts of the conference. Instead, their role should be limited to exhibit space or more modest offerings within the program.

**Carefully crafted sponsorship agreements** will determine where the lines are drawn around these two key criteria, which will frame decisions around access to podium speaking opportunities or attendee contact lists. In contrast, these examples point to red-flags that will call for much more control over a sponsor's participation, if it is even to be allowed.

*Example 1: A manufacturer of a new medication hears that a scientist doing research on a related disease will be on the program. The company offers to sponsor a cocktail hour to capitalize on the opportunity to pitch their drug.*

*Example 2: A lab offers to host a reception but requires that attendees take a full-length tour in order to get a drink ticket.*

*Example 3: An industry lobbying group offers to sponsor Wi-Fi, but to use the service, attendees must provide an e-mail address that will then be added to the group's mailing lists.*

*Example 4: An organization opposed to genetically modified foods offers to sponsor lunch but requires that a representative of the organization sit at every table.*

**Organizers must clarify that any sponsor's contribution applies only to the event in question.** In other words, sponsorship does not qualify as a blanket endorsement from the WFSJ or a member association. This distinction will side-step real or perceived conflicts of interest by defining the limits of a sponsor's ability to solicit content, presenters, or attendees.

That being said, such sponsors can be offered an opportunity to showcase their perspective on matters that pertain to the conference, but only if the defining characteristics of the event is respected. Such respect lays the foundation for **packages with multiple levels of support and recognition for a variety of sponsors**, such as these:

- Field Trips
- Receptions
- Meals & Breaks
- Networking Lounges (Comfortable seating and coffee where attendees can relax; sponsor can have a presence there)
- Espresso Cart/Coffee Service
- Wine or other beverages at events (sponsor could have unique label or sticker)

- Lanyards (but not nametag itself)
- Wi-Fi (with a brief sponsor screen or pop-up)
- Tweet-wall or similar
- Recharging Station (for electronics)
- Power-strips in session rooms
- Transportation
- Composting or Recycling Facilities
- Plates, napkins, or flower arrangements
- Hotel Keycards
- Wearable technology
- Hospitality Suite
- Welcome displays at the airport, hotel lobby, conference facility etc.

Other sponsor benefits could be thanks expressed in welcoming remarks from a host institution's dignitaries, as well as complimentary sponsor attendance at the following events:

- Receptions
- Opening Plenary
- Lunches
- field trips and tours

Other acknowledgements of sponsors can be made in a Web site, printed materials, or in branded items given to attendees as part of their registration.