



Assessment Tool for a Professional Society

Below is a list of questions that should be answered by the association staff in conjunction with its Board and members to help determine a professional society's international potential:

Geographic Considerations

- What percentage of your members by number comes from different geographic regions (countries)?
- What percentage of your revenue can be allocated to those same regions (countries)?
- What percentage of your organizations investment (expenditures) can be allocated to those same regions (countries)?
- If you could start from a fresh beginning, which regions would be your most promising potential markets for stakeholder / revenue development today?

The association may find that it should only target initially one country or a few countries before it decides to research a whole region or continent such as Europe, Asia, or Latin America. It's important to start small, and then grow slow.

Differences in Practice of Profession Geographically

- Are there significant differences in the practice and sophistication of the profession by country, region, or continent?
- Are there differences in how technology is applied or information is disseminated?
- Is there a difference in the basic, graduate, and post graduate education systems that impact your profession and how it is practiced?
- What are the reasons for these differences?

For example, in some parts of the world where the association considers distributing its publications, some countries may have a very slow or unreliable postal system. The association may have to look at using an international mail distribution company or the Internet to ensure its publications get to members on a timely basis.

Partnership Potential

- Does the profession have counterpart associations or related organizations in other countries?
- What is the environment/context in which the profession is organized in these countries?
- How do members of the profession communicate, share information, network with their peers, and lobby their government?
- Have you had the opportunity to evaluate first-hand the strengths and weaknesses of your potential partners (due diligence on their finances, programs, products, services, reputation, etc.)?
- Do you have strong relations with the current leaders of the organizations you are considering partnering with? How, when and by whom are decisions made in those organizations?
- What cultural and regional differences exist among the profession in various countries?
- What about the use of benchmarking with associations in other, although somewhat closely related professions?
- Is there common agreement on benchmarking?
- Is there an interest or need to develop international professional standards and credentials?
- Is this being driven by the needs of member companies, individuals, or both?
- Do you involve universities and other institutes of higher learning?

It is almost a given that a counterpart association in Europe or Latin America, for example, will have a different modus operandi or philosophy towards the profession than in Asia, and the association will have to develop a different strategy for working with the various groups.

Benefits of Membership

- Is your country generally considered the world leader in this profession?
- Will international members recognize what they have to gain by joining your organization?
- How will your members benefit from their counterparts in other countries?
- Sharing of expertise and information?
- Do your individual members view globalization as a threat or opportunity? Why?

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ASSOCIATION

Number and Monetary Value of International Members

- Does the association currently have members from other countries?
- What percent of the membership and of total dues do they represent?
- Do they pay equal, lesser, or greater dues?

International Membership Participation and Governance

- Are the international members active?
- How are they represented in the association?
- Can they (and do they) serve on committees and in other leadership positions?

- Are there any challenges associated with their involvement?

Membership Potential/Interest in Products/Services

- Are international nonmembers at your conventions, meetings, and educational seminars?
- Do they subscribe to your periodicals or buy your materials?
- Do they communicate with you electronically or access your web site on a regular basis?

Assessing External Market

- Do your international members seek out the association's products and services?
- Do you actively market the association's products and services to international members and nonmembers?
- Is market data available that would shed light on differences in interest and need between members in and out of your country?
- Have you surveyed the market potential or conducted trend analyses?

External Competitive Environment

- Is any other organization, association, company, or government agency supplying goods and services to your international members?
- How do the quality, accuracy, price, and delivery system compare to what the association is able to offer?
- Is there an advantage in working cooperatively?
- To what extent have they penetrated the particular market they serve?
- Could members in your country benefit from their products and services?
- Is national pride or identity a significant factor that will influence your relative ability to compete?

Organization/Structure/Culture/Budget

- Can the organization's structure and culture accommodate international involvement?
- Can the association's budget handle the variances in currency value, international travel, mailing costs, overseas meetings, satellite offices, and the possibility of additional staff?
- In addition, can the organization's staff adjust to the language and cultural differences of international members? Can consultants to redesign or redirect your governance structure or staff be considered?
- Does the mission and vision reflect a global perspective?
- Will the association's mission have to change?

Motivation for International Expansion

- Who is driving the need to consider expanding internationally? Members? The Board? Other volunteer leaders? The chief staff executive?
- What "champions" are there within your organization for globalization?
- What is the motivation?

- Additional revenue for the organization? Access to new markets? Exchange of information or expertise?

The association's thoughtful and thorough response to these questions should help the organization to identify its current strengths and weaknesses, internally and externally, potential threats it may need to address, and strategic opportunities that exist internationally for the organization. In some cases, this assessment tool may lead the association to rethink its mission and spend time revising its long-range strategic plan.