

European Biosafety Association

Business Plan 2022 – 2024

Overview

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented huge challenges to businesses and organisations globally who have faced an unprecedented, and sudden, change to their operations. This change has been more prolonged than most expected, with implications for the short, medium and long term. EBSA's operations have been particularly affected by the pandemic and it is vital for the Association that a strategy is implemented to navigate the current troubled waters and use them as an instrument of positive change if possible.

Background

EBSA's activities cover a wide remit including advocacy, networking and focal points, but its primary operations (until Spring 2019) related to the organisation of the Association's annual conference, and associated training courses. The conference took place in a different European location each year and usually took the format of two days of training courses preceding two days of the conference. Both of these activities normally, but not always, took place at the same venue. Numbers attending varied, but conference attendance has traditionally been in the region of 200 – 300 people.

Finances*

The vast majority of EBSA's income comes from five sources:

- Individual memberships
- Corporate memberships
- Training course fees
- Conference fees
- Conference sponsors and exhibitors.

Individual annual EBSA membership attracts a modest fee of €40 including VAT (or €140 for four years), while corporate membership costs €900. As such, while individual members vastly outnumber corporate members, the income from each is approximately similar. All EBSA secretariat operations (provided by 2MPact) result in a processing cost to EBSA, meaning that an individual €40 membership only gains EBSA a net ~€18 after VAT and administration costs for an uncomplicated (i.e. no reminders sent) membership renewal. Where a number of reminders are sent (and this is not an uncommon occurrence), there may be no net gain to EBSA, and potentially even a net cost. Four year memberships are far more beneficial to EBSA finances as they attract a similar administration cost for a sum of money nearly four times larger. Due to the significant discount on conference attendance associated with membership, it is reasonable to speculate that many individuals take out membership primarily to lower the cost of attending the conference. Currently, membership runs for

a calendar year (i.e. January to December); as such, someone joining in December pays the same amount as some who joined the previous January.

Most of EBSA's income derives from the conference and related training courses, but in recent years the gap between event income and expenditure has been narrowing, and there have even been some small overall losses. Income and cost is not, however, distributed equally across all activities and a number of training courses in recent years have been poorly attended by paying attendees which resulted in an overall loss for those courses.

Ticket prices have stayed the same for at least the last 6 years although the costs for venues, catering, travel and hotel reimbursements have gone up. It has been the policy not to make the tickets more expensive as they are already high for participants coming from southern and Eastern Europe.

A particular problem is that much of EBSA's assets are made up of sums of money owed to the organisation and, as such, are not actually available to spend. A large amount of this is associated with VAT owed from conferences over a number of years. Despite considerable effort from 2MPact, and their VAT agents VMC, EBSA has still not recovered these monies (approximately €35,000) as a result of slowness in governments reimbursing. Further significant amounts are also owed from unpaid invoices for the years 2018 and 2019.

**February 2022 update: VAT from one conference (Madrid) has been reclaimed; majority of outstanding 2018 and 2019 invoices have been paid.*

Effect of Covid-19 on 2020 / 2021 conference and courses

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in the postponement of the 2020 EBSA conference in Luxembourg from April to September 2020. At the time of the decision, this was believed to represent sufficient time to allow the international situation return to normal and, due to the work of the Local Organising Committee (LOC) and Conference Programming Working Group (CPWG), resulted in no cost to EBSA other than refunding some registrants. Unfortunately, the pandemic continued and the Luxembourg conference was again rescheduled to April 2021. The 2021 Luxembourg conference was eventually cancelled in December 2020 due to the international outlook at that time.

Response of EBSA to Covid-19

EBSA Council, CPWG and the Education and Training Working Group (ETWG) demonstrated considerable agility in responding to the pandemic. As well as the considerable work involved in multiple conference rescheduling, an online seminar was organised in October 2020 to give members value for their contribution, and a number of online (Zoom) paid training courses took place in late 2020. All of these online events were well attended, with numbers in excess of 100 taking part in some events.

The success of the online events in Autumn / Winter 2020 informed EBSA's plans for 2021. When it became clear that a physical conference would not take place in the year, the organisation pivoted to provide value for members, and to advance its goals, by primarily organising online activities for the year. These comprise:

- EBSA Thursdays (CPWG) – 5 online seminars and discussion fora on specific topics taking place regularly throughout the year, free of cost for members.
- Online training courses (ETWG) – a series of 12 topic specific ~2 – 3 hour courses taking place via Zoom in 2021, at a cost for attendees.

The EBSA Thursdays were well attended (on average 100 registered participants). The frequency however turned out to present organizational challenges for CPWG. Also cases were noticed of members forwarding the zoom link to non-members.

The training courses in particular have proven remarkably successful, with very significant numbers attending from international organisations such as IAEA and GIZ. Such attendance would not have been possible at a physical location. The courses have provided a much-needed source of income in the absence of the traditional conference; their organisation has, however, placed a considerable burden upon ETWG members, and facilitating adaptations for the large numbers of attendees from IAEA proved difficult at times.

Learnings from Covid response

Positive

- Many members are happy to attend events online, which saves them time and travel expense
- Online training courses can provide a substantial source of income
- Online events allow EBSA to plan its activities throughout the year, rather than mostly focussed upon a single week
- Reduced operating costs
- Online events allow EBSA to obtain a wider range of members especially external to Europe
- More regular connection with members

Negative

- Online events do not give the networking and personal interaction opportunities of a face to face conference
- Uncertainty with regard to future planning
- Workload on members of ETWG and CPWG
- Fewer opportunities for sponsorship income

Challenges

Short term (to end 2022)

- Uncertainty regarding international COVID restrictions impacting face-to-face meetings
- Managing relationship with IAEA (and any other large organisations which may become involved)
- VAT payment reimbursement
- Monies owed to EBSA from 2018 and 2019

Medium term (to 2024)

- Future of face to face conferences
- Location of face to face conferences for VAT purposes
- Continuation of online activities, and extent thereof

Potential actions and options for 2022 to 2024

Membership

- Introduce rolling 12 month membership for new members
- Increase individual annual membership cost and / or decrease four year cost
- Streamline renewal process by implementing Procurios IT back end system (completed)

*Athens conference**

- Conduct risk assessment regarding Athens attendance including obtaining views of membership and observing outcome of face-to-face conferences
- Obtain more favourable cancellation terms from venue, or find another which will facilitate
- Flexibility built into the conference organisation to allow for a range of number of attendees

**Update October 2021: Athens conference has been rescheduled to 2023. 2022 conference will take place in Belgium.*

Outstanding payment to EBSA

- 2018 debtors to be contacted June 2021. Outstanding money to be paid, or amounts written off as bad debt by end first half 2021 (*action finalised Autumn 2021*)
- 2019 debtors to be contacted Autumn 2021. Outstanding money to be paid, or amounts written off as bad debt by end 2021 (*action finalised February 2022*)
- 2020 debtors to be contacted June 2022. Outstanding money to be paid, or amounts written off as bad debt by end summer 2022
- Treasurer to contact VMC to ensure they are doing all they can re outstanding VAT (*action completed*).

Face to face conferences

- Investigate option of alternating conference location between Belgium and other countries to reduce VAT issues
- To continue in their current format (or similar) for the time being subject to engagement with Working Groups.

Online activities

- Online events (training courses and member seminars) to continue alongside the face-to-face conference and courses, at a level congruent with the bandwidth of CPWG and ETWG members and in alignment with the Annual Conference
- Continue to build relationships with large organisations who may supply many attendees to courses
- Build EBSA membership into training packages for large organisations
- Explore the possibility of establishing certified training courses.

Services

- Where organisations require new custom training packages, consider:
 - providing training packages based upon current and previous EBSA training courses
 - developing a new EBSA training course; or
 - direct them in a transparent and equal opportunity way to established EBSA members with training consultancies.
- Where organisations require certification of facilities etc, direct them to established EBSA members with experience in this area in a transparent and equal opportunity way

Supporting CPWG and ETWG

- Establish closer relations between the working groups and Council
- ETWG and CPWG representatives to attend all council meetings
- Examine working group activities to see where Council can provide additional support and where operational efficiencies can be made
- Motivate EBSA members to join working group/s and/or act as Contact Points.
- A transparent and equitable payment scheme for instructors to be implemented in 2022.

Advocacy and outreach

- Support focal points in their mission (e.g. biocides, animal by products, etc.)
- Maintain and enhance links with international biosafety and related organisations
- Forge stronger links with national and international regulatory bodies (e.g. European Union).