

DRAFT



**MINUTES**  
**March 5, 2010**  
**8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.**  
**Hynes Room 103**

**Attendees:** *Partnership Members:* David Colella, James Coyle, James E. Rooney, Richard Dimino, David Giblin, Paul Guzzi, Scott Jordan, John Keenan, Patrick Moscaritolo, Charlayne Murrell-Smith, Joseph Nee, David O’Shaughnessy, John Palmeiri, Lowell Richards, Kairos Shen, Samuel Tyler

*Customer Advisory Group Members:* Sam Lippman (Facilitator), Terrence Arth, Pam Ballinger, Salvatore Chiarelli, Anthony Floreano, Deidre Irwin Ross, Mary Larkin, Robbi Lycett, Ken McAvoy, Fred Mitzner, Cathy Nash, Felix Niespodziewanski, Robin Preston, Christy Richards, Cathy Scheck, Paula Schneider, Judy Smith, Laura Thevenot

*Others in attendance (partial list):* Tseng-Wei Chung, Michelle Ho, Erin Murphey, Maureen Shea Baker, Ken Sinkiewicz, Howard Davis, Johanna Storella, Jeanne Sullivan, Katie Tumiel, Mac Daniel, Erica Burkhard, Caitlin Nagle, Judy Sheng

*The March 5, 2010 meeting was a joint meeting for Convention Partnership (CP) and Customer Advisory Group (CAG) Members. The Customer Advisory Group is composed of the MCCA’s past, current, future and potential meeting organizer clients representing a broad variety of meetings industries. CAG is designed to evaluate the conventions meeting industry “best practices” and to provide input to the Boston convention industry on the products and services that are offered.*

**1. Welcome and introductions**

Mr. Rooney opened the meeting by welcoming CP and CAG members to the meeting and asking everyone around the table to introduce themselves. Mr. Rooney described the meeting as a chance to engage a dialogue beyond the presentations the MCCA and its staff members provided in the first two meetings. Mr. Rooney stressed the importance of continued open and honest dialogue. He then introduced Sam Lippman, a professional meetings facilitator from Integrated Show Management and Marketing, who described the CAG mission and outlined the discussion topics for the joint meeting.

**2. Discussion about Boston as a Convention Destination**

Mr. Lippman began the dialogue by asking CAG members to speak generally about what comes to when they think about Boston.

**“How do you make your decisions? What does Boston mean to you, to your attendees, to your exhibitors? Please give some impressions and ideas on what Boston means to you in a competitive situation.”**

- Ms. Schneider with the American Society of Cataract & Refractive Surgery (ASCRS) said, “Part of the reason I came back here is because the Bureau made such an effort to

get us. Had you not built the BCEC we would not have been able to come. Boston is a walking city and is comfortable and has a lure because it has all things NY has to offer without being overwhelming. At a recent medical advisory board meeting, there were a lot of meeting planners that said they would love to bring their meetings to your city, but they just can't fit."

- Ms. Ross with the American Library Association (ALA) stated, "We love the BCEC. Last time we were here, ALA was at the Hynes and this year it was at the BCEC. We love the new facility, because it's so beautiful and clean, however our biggest complaint from attendees was that it was too isolated. Boston is one of our attendees' favorite cities because there is a huge population of librarians in the Northeast. It makes the commute easy in and out. I would like to bring our annual meeting for 25,000 people but we just won't fit. Once we fill up our exhibit hall with booths, I don't know where we would have our general session."
- Ms. Thevenot with the American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO) answered, "There is a strong medical base in Boston which makes it attractive for medical industry meeting planners. You also get many Europeans when we come to Boston because of accessibility and ease of travel. We know what we are going to get in Boston, similar to San Francisco, and that's great attendance. My meetings are about 45% international and coming into Boston is huge. Every time we come to Boston we break records. The medical schools in Boston are huge too because we get the local leaders as well. This is where we want to go because this is where we make the money. We had record attendance here in 2008, but people were complaining because they had 45 minute shuttle bus rides to and from their hotels which caused them to miss important educational sessions. We had to spend \$750,000 on shuttle buses. You need hotels within walking distance of the BCEC now. Right now our meeting is outgrowing many cities. We are looking at rotating between four different cities and would like Boston to be one of the cities in 2012 and 2016, but it would be a big leap of faith for us."
- Mr. McAvoy with Reed Exhibitions noted that his shows, "are very heavy in NYC due to media." He noted that the advantage of NY, Washington, DC and Philadelphia is that the hotels are within walking distance so they aren't forced to incur additional expenses to shuttle attendees.
- Ms. Scheck with Heart Rhythm Society (HRS) stated, "Forty percent of our attendees are international and need to stay in hotels. Not having enough hotel rooms makes booking Boston a challenge. Couple that with the fact that there isn't a lot to do around the BCEC, especially at night. So, attendees end up spending all day inside the convention center because they don't want to spend 45 minutes each day going back and forth to Back Bay."
- Ms. Lycett of the Biotechnology Industry Organization used her 2007 BIO event as an example: "We need Boston because this is the hub of the bio industry. Exhibitor rules are easier here and they appreciate coming here. In 2007 we had record breaking attendance. Thirty-five percent of that attendance was international. The Governor of Massachusetts came and made an important announcement for the Massachusetts Bio Industry. But, we had to spend \$1,000,000 on shuttle bus transportation." Because of Ms. Lycett's event's attendance numbers, she was forced to block hotel rooms in suburbs like Cambridge, which, she said, "is not an easy or fast commute." Ms. Lycett

also said she had to bus to many off site receptions: “The shuttle bus rides are long and our attendees have tight schedules and can’t be late for sessions. We are coming back in 2012 and we are going to be spread out even more. It will be very challenging for our attendees. We will have to put our business center at the World Trade Center and our career fair at the Hynes. We are going to squeeze in and make it work for us, but it will be difficult. We love the BCEC and are holding dates in 2015 hoping that we fit. If the BCEC had a million square feet it would have what no other city in New England has.”

- Mr. McAvoy with Reed Exhibitions (show organizer for PAX East) said, “NY is spending 1.6 billion dollars on a new roof and will have no additional expansion space for at least 20 years. Boston has a distinct advantage because we judge convention centers in so many different ways including airports nearby, hotels, and the people we deal with. Boston has a “can do” attitude. Your people are some of the best that I have ever worked with, but your facilities are just a little too small. You have a real advantage if you expand because right now we have no other place to go but NY. We have led the Tradeshow 200 list for some years and there is such advantage if Boston expands because right now it is too small.” Mr. McAvoy said he would like to see the convention center expand significantly and that he would like to help Boston take advantage of the opportunity he sees for the city to be the “dominant force in the North East.”

### **3. Boston’s hotels and site venues**

Mr. Lippman asked CAG members to describe the challenges experienced when multiple events are booked in Boston, especially around booking hotel room blocks and scheduling loading dock move-in and move-out procedures.

#### **“Help the CP group understand move-in and set-up dates as it relates to the scope and size of exhibits.”**

- Ms. Larkin with Diversified Business Communications (International Boston Seafood Show (IBSS) & New England Food Show) mentioned her experience moving IBSS in and out of the BCEC when another large show was booked to move-in directly after. Ms. Larkin said there was a significant impact when multiple shows are booked near or on top of one another. “There were a couple of times where our dates didn’t work out. There was a situation where there were 2 large shows coming in right before us. One of those shows had to be broken down overnight with pretty elaborate break downs and then you have the issue of not enough hotel rooms around. We have staff all over the city and we need hotel rooms booked for seven nights. Our show takes five days in advance of the show for move in. There are more move-in days than show days.”
- Mr. Floreano of Freeman Decorating Company spoke logistically about marshalling space and loading dock use: “When having two shows running simultaneously it is important to have the logistical requirements to be able to build and set up a show while another is running without it interfering with the front of the house. It needs to be a serious consideration with any expansions.”
- Mr. Niespodziewanski of the American College of Surgeons suggested Boston work to even out the peaks and lulls in its hotel and convention center occupancy. He said if we are able to book more events consistently throughout the year, we will be able to increase jobs and steady the hours of our convention center workers. Mr.

Niespodziewanski also made a point that he is booked for Boston in 2015 on a “leap of faith.” He believes Boston needs hotels desperately, as soon as possible.”

- Ms. Schneider (ASCRS) warned CP members that Boston should not get into a situation where they are losing business because of the decision made about the future of the center. She mentioned centers that are under fire for poor management or poor union relations, and centers that promise to build hotels in order to book meetings, but still haven't fulfilled those promises.

*Mr. Richards of the Convention Partnership asked CAG members to describe the demands of vendors or exhibitors trying to book rooms in lower-priced or lower-rated hotels.*

- Ms. Schneider (ASCRS) answered by saying that exhibitor personnel rely on mid and lower-priced hotels. For her show specifically she noted that the medical administrators and surgical residents that come can't afford the three and four star hotels: “You need Hampton Inns, Embassy Suites, and Marriott's. They will fill up.”
- Ms. Preston of the National School Boards Association (NSBA) stressed the importance of wide-ranging hotel inventory: “You need a variety of hotels and a variety of prices. We go to San Francisco and Chicago and they have the inventory we need. Then when coming to Boston my attendees are going to have sticker shock with hotel prices. If it is not affordable for our board members who travel on our tax payers' dollars, it is difficult. It is a huge concern for us moving forward with Boston.”
- Ms. Smith with Orgill described the challenges inherent to finding reasonable hotel rates for her attendees: “We have a seven-day set up and 516,000 square feet carpeted wall to wall. We have outgrown several facilities. We are currently wall to wall at the BCEC. Our attendance in 2009 was the largest it has ever been. The client base up here is unbelievable. We have such a range of attendees with international, mom and pop and Amish dealers. I have to watch out for the right price for exhibitors and they did complain but because of the high attendance they were okay. You need tiered pricing to continue to get our exhibitors. We sold out all 3 hotels in the area.” She also mentioned that attendees for her show tend to be hesitant to take public transportation. Because of this hesitation and the lack of development around the Waterfront, her attendees often complain that they don't have enough to do in Boston.
- Mr. Arth with the National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS) said that he agrees with the need for tiered hotel packages but said he would “caution adding a one or two star hotels in premium spots. These types of hotels tend to raise the prices of their hotel rooms due to compression.”
- Mr. Arth also advised that we not expand without hotel rooms: “Make sure your hotel rooms match the opening of your expanded convention center. You need to do the hotels and the convention center as a unified plan so you can accommodate all the people coming. It's deeper than just the expansion of your center; you're going to lag until you get the hotels. Boston has a unique campus with Logan being so close. Don't leave out some sort of transportation element between the three, whether it be designated lanes or people movers. It will be a deterrent if you don't think of how you are going to transport between the Hynes, BCEC and airport.”

- Ms. Richards with the National Association of Realtors echoed the need for a variety of hotels and additionally said Boston needs more big hotels: “You need massive hotel space. I recommend another headquarter hotel with at least 100,000 sq. feet or additional meeting space”
- Ms. Lycett (Bio Industry Organization) suggested we seek greater occupancy percentages through new headquarter hotel development. She told us that having “multiple events in the city at one time strains the hotels now. People don’t realize that we already aren’t able to get 100% of your hotel rooms now because of tourism, or other events. In other cities we maybe get 70% of the rooms at a headquarter hotel. In Boston we’re struggling to get 50-60%.”
- Ms. Schneider (ASCRS) also commented on hotel room blocking. “We are not even blocking for 100% of our attendees. We only block for a portion of our attendees because some book rooms on their own. So our hotel room nights are usually even higher than what we block off. We blocked 6,500 hotel rooms but we had 13,000 attendees; those attendees are staying somewhere.”

#### **4. Floor opened to Convention Partnership to ask questions of Customer Advisory Group**

*Representative John Keenan of the Convention Partnership asked whether CAG members would like to see a casino in Boston.*

Mr. Lippman asked CAG participants to answer by a show of hands. No CAG members raised their hands.

- Multiple CAG members agreed that casinos in the area tend to raise hotel rates on Saturday and Sunday, and make blocking rooms off on those days more difficult as well. Other CAG members suggested that casinos attract convention members away from the meetings and they want their attendees to stay at the show functions.

Mr. Arth (NACDS) asked CP members how long it usually takes the expansion process to move forward?

- Mr. Rooney of the MCCA and Convention Partnership answered by first saying that there is no designated “shovel-ready” date in mind. He stated that the goal of the Convention Partnership is to compile a report-style recommendation for the T5 initiative, including the expansion of the BCEC to be handed over to the mayor, governor, the speaker, and the senate president by the end of the year. After that, the next step would be to get some sort of legislation passed.

*Mr. Nee of the Convention Partnership made a general statement about the MCCA.*

“I’ve lived in South Boston for 61 years. When they first came out and said we’re going to build this building we were nervous and everyone had a lot of questions. They did a great job of including us in the planning. Since then they’ve donated to at least 45 non-profits in South Boston and probably over a half million dollars in four years.” Mr. Nee said he feels like because of the open dialogue between the MCCA and the community the first time around, community members will be more open to the process this time.

- Mr. Niespodziewanski (ACS) commented on the development of the harbor area. “You need to maximize the potential of this area and you need more activity. You already have success because it’s a walking city. The community should push harder to accelerate the development process. You need to urge your community leaders to push developers and move this forward.”
- Ms. Nash of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), a potential future client for Boston, addressed the nature of her event and its needs for hotel rooms and space. “My attendees come for education; our goal is to make the show like a small university. We have no meeting booked in Boston, but we have dates on hold in 2020. There’s just no infrastructure in Boston that can meet our needs. We use 12 additional hotels for meetings and have 9,000 room nights at our peak. There is no way we can bus because of timing between meetings. We run 50 sessions concurrently. In other cities our attendees are able to walk 10 minutes between sessions. In San Francisco, New Orleans, and Pennsylvania it’s just not a problem. We don’t have the infrastructure in New York either, but we know that we will get 26,000 attendees if we go there. We just can’t afford to take that risk with Boston.”

*Mr. Shen of the Convention Partnership spoke to the original development of the BCEC and asked about the planners’ needs for synergy between the facility and the hotel. He explained that the MCCA only built on two-thirds of the land they acquired for the BCEC which will make expansion much easier this time around because we banked 20 acres of land. He asked planners about San Francisco, a city that took a similar approach, and saved land so that they expanded gradually over two expansion periods. He asked a series of questions related to this process:*

*“What is the best use of land? What if the exhibit hall was across the street? What if the hotel was two blocks away instead of attached? What do competitors do?”*

- Ms. Preston (NSBA) felt that exhibit space must be contiguous space and that she would like one million square feet of contiguous space. She said it would be a disservice to separate exhibit hall space. She commented on the setup in a competitive center that has separated exhibit space and said, “once attendees go out the door, they’re gone.”
- Ms. Nash (APA) and Ms. Thevenot also felt strongly about contiguous exhibit hall space and mentioned another center that is now in the process of trying to remedy the problem of separated exhibit hall space by placing a walkway that connects the two because meeting planners, attendees and exhibitor did not like the separation
- Other CAG members said that exhibitors tend to voice concerns about which hall is busier, even in a situation like the Hynes where halls are located on two floors in the same building. Other suggestions from the meeting planners included the recommendation to make sure that hotels are attached and that pedestrian traffic is taken into consideration. Some CAG members felt attendees should not have to worry about crossing busy streets to go to and from hotels and the convention center.
- Mr. Niespodziewanski (ACS) said that don’t want to find ourselves “landlocked” and again echoed Mr. McAvoy’s suggestion that we “don’t build it if [we] don’t have the hotels and Waterfront development to support larger events.”

- Mr. McAvoy (Reed) answered Mr. Shen by saying, “You need the building to be efficient and consider move in and move out and marshalling yards. The hotels that are going to be down there should be attached by walkways so that attendees can avoid crossing streets during heavy traffic times.” Mr. McAvoy also suggested that we have agreements with the hotels so that their meeting rooms become available when large conventions are in Boston. He used the Hilton in Orlando as an example of a hotel that works well with a convention center. He also felt we should make the feel of the BCEC like a college campus.

*Mr. Dimino of the Convention Partnership inquired about the affect of shuttle bus costs in Boston: He also asked about the willingness of show attendees to take public transportation.*

- Ms. Thevenot told the CP that Boston lost her ASTRO event to another city because of shuttle costs. She said that when picking a city, her board weighs the city against the transportation costs. She suggested that we offer discounts for MBTA service, especially bus and subway cards to try to get more attendees to utilize public transportation. At the end of answering Mr. Dimino’s questions about transportation she also added that there is a real need for an additional, larger ballroom at the BCEC.

*Mr. Shen of the Convention Partnership asked how big the ballroom would need to be.*

- Ms. Thevenot (ASTRO) answered that she would like 80,000 square feet of flexible set-up space.
- Mr. Niespodziewanski (ACS) stated that every avoidable expense diminishes the convention center’s chance that it will get an association: “Every dollar you add to the cost it is less likely that we would return to Boston. If you have an opportunity to prevent adding expenses I would go that route.”
- Ms. Larkin (Diversified) described Barcelona as a model of how transportation should work for a convention center. In Barcelona, the train station has escalators that feed right into the center. She said that “every meeting planner has a tipping point when it comes to expenses and that Boston has already passed the tipping point” for her.

*Mr. Lowell asked CAG members whether they’d be willing to put their support for BCEC expansion in writing to say: “If you build it, we will come.”*

Mr. Lippman asked CAG each attendee to raise his or her hand if he or she would be willing to sign his or her name in support of Boston.

All but two CAG members raised their hands.

- Ms. Nash (APA) did not raise her hand, but said “I will come if you build the hotels. Ease of getting to and from is something we consider because we have 50-60% international attendees.”

*Mr. Lowell commented on the importance of international attendance in today’s conventions and meetings world. He asked CAG members if they’ve seen a pattern of change. Mr. Lippman also asked members to comment on the difference between international and domestic attendees.*

- Ms. Nash (APA) said, “Fifty percent of my attendance is international so it’s a big factor when we look at cities. It takes them longer to get here, so they stay longer. They treat the meetings like a destination. We’ll be in Hawaii in 2011 and we’re actually advertising it as a totally international meeting. We extended the meeting from five days to 12 days because of the international market.”
- Mr. Mitzner (Conference Direct) also commented that when international attendees come to Boston they tend to come early to tour the convention city and stay later to travel New England and the tri-state area.
- Ms. Thevenot (ASTRO) said that she thought her Boston event would bring more European attendees and less Asian, but found it was actually equally spread between Asian and European countries. She also said that Boston brought her “highest international attendance ever.”
- Ms. Schneider (ASCRS) said that she has about 45% international travelers. She noted that while the American doctor attending the convention may fly in and out in four days, the international attendee will likely stay for seven. She said that the international attendees are the ones that really “stay in the hotels and spend the money.”
- Ms. Lycett (BIO) said that about 35% of her attendees are international. She told CP members that international attendees tend to do more of the tours and sightseeing. She also mentioned that international attendees usually stay for the full convention length instead of attending just one or two days of sessions because they conduct business with local life sciences firms, and that they will likely stay and vacation after the convention.

*Mr. Rooney of the Convention Partnership asked CAG members to comment on their feelings about what they like to see as far as a convention destination’s softer side in the “hospitality culture” of a city.*

- Ms. Thevenot (ASTRO) said that many of the physicians that attend ASTRO like to entertain. They have a need for restaurants within walking distance, and restaurants that can service a clientele looking to impress their guests. She also said that we “need to think about the labor relations side of the business” as we think about expansion.
- Ms. Lycett (BIO) suggested we think about hospitality training in conjunction with expansion. She recalled that when the Westin opened, she heard that over 50% of its employees had never worked in a hotel before.
- Ms. Schneider (ASCRS) said she felt Boston had a good labor reputation already compared to other cities: “They are knowledgeable and work well with our exhibitors. New York, Chicago and Philly don’t have what you have. You need to keep up the great work and maintain your great reputation.”
- Mr. McAvoy (Reed) said that, “The complexity of shows changes with more space. As cities build bigger centers, the work rules shift and exhibitor rights change.” Mr. McAvoy felt leaders now should work out those changes and communicate them clearly so that if

politicians and hall management change the guidelines are clearly set from the beginning.

- Mr. Floreano (Freeman) said that for the past five years the 20 acres of marshalling space and loading dock space at the BCEC has been extremely helpful. Mr. Floreano said that “on average it costs us about 10% more to do business at the Hynes than the BCEC due to lack of loading dock space. You need to consider the logistical space of set up and moving in when expanding so that it doesn’t drive up the cost of doing business in Boston.”
- Mr. Lippman asked for one more show of hands regarding the need for an auditorium. He asked CAG members to raise their hands if they would like a fixed-seat auditorium to be part of expansion.
- Ms. Nash (APA) was the only CAG member to raise her hand. She qualified her statement by saying it wasn’t a “deal breaker,” but that it would be an added bonus. She will be using three auditoriums in Hawaii for her 2011 meeting.
- All other CAG members felt that flexible space was more important than fixed-seating.
- Ms. Schneider (ASCRS) said that too many meetings have different specs for setup and that she too often sees auditoriums sit unused at convention centers.

##### **5. Concluding Remarks**

Mr. Lippman ended the meeting by noting that while he had originally intended to separate the meeting’s talking points into different categories like: hotel inventory, exhibit hall space, Waterfront development, cost of business in Boston – it became clear early on that all of these issues under consideration are closely related and that it was nearly impossible to talk about one and not the others. Mr. Rooney and Mr. Guzzi thanked Customer Advisory Members for their open and honest dialogue, and thanked the Convention Partnership for attending the joint meeting.

Meeting was adjourned at 10:00am.

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