

Common/Not-So-Common Case Conundrums in CME

Case 2

Part 1

When the medical education company Innovative Education (IE) developed the proposal for the dinner satellite symposium at a major association meeting, they were very excited about the engaging education they were proposing. It had it all—interaction, reflection, active learning, gaming, outcomes—and the staff at IE felt confident it was a slam dunk. Of course, all that innovation had a price tag so they submitted it to a number of commercial supporters and joked about what to add on when all of the grantors wanted to be a part of it!

Their confidence proved to be warranted when they received their first approval within three weeks! A second, smaller approval followed soon after. This was going to be great! They were already preparing their submission for the Alliance for Continuing Education in the Health Professions awards!

Then crickets.....and more crickets.....and then the denials came.

The time was approaching where IE had to pull the trigger in order to keep the outstanding faculty that had been invited and maintain its prime symposium spot. It was time for some serious financial creativity.

Questions to Consider:

How would you have handled this situation?

How can a CME provider be creative in dealing with partial funding for educational activities?

In order to make the activity described here viable, something has to go. Would you suggest cuts across the board or would you focus on one area to make the sacrifice so other areas remain robust? Or do you cut bait completely, return the promised funds and try again with another grant at another association meeting?

Part 2

It was rough and there was pain, but you found a way to make the symposium work. Your faculty are confirmed, the catering is set, and content development is well under way. You're feeling pretty good about how things are coming together.

Three weeks before the symposium, you receive an email from the primary commercial supporter stating that "Even though it appears that the CMS ruling supports the use of an educational grant funds for meals, our legal and compliance team has decided to approach it very conservatively and now will not allow any funds to be used for food."

Your contact there tells you that she feels horrible and states that "our legal is sometime just crazy conservative" and suggests that you "get creative" since everyone has a stake in the success of the symposium.

Questions to Consider:

There is no mistaking that attendees at your symposium will expect to be fed. How might you "get creative" with this?

Would you consider having IE put some "skin in the game" and list the organization as a supporter of the educational initiative?

Part 3

Okay...lots of roadblocks, but you're finally in the home stretch. Alas, three days before the symposium, the Academic Medical Center where your Chairperson works decides that no faculty may be involved in education where he/she may end up having honorarium paid, or food and travel reported, on the CMS website.

Since he doesn't want to make waves with the center's Dean, your Chair informs you that he may need to withdraw from the activity.

Questions to Consider

How might this crisis have been averted in a proactive manner?

Does your organization have a process to inform faculty about possible CMS reporting of their involvement in educational activities?

How would you handle the Chair's current concerns?