

Industry Consultation

International AIDS Conference Future Directions Project

February 23, 2005
Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Summary

Four representatives of the International AIDS Society and 11 representatives from the pharmaceutical industry met for approximately two and half hours to discuss industry perspectives on the International AIDS Conferences. There are many ways industry has participated in the conferences and industry representatives said they want to base their future involvement on what the theme and focus of these events will be, as well as who will be attending. More can be done to highlight industry contributions to the conference and the overall response to AIDS. Expanding the role of scientific research, and improving the quality of the science presentations made, are priorities. Industry representatives want the conferences to be a place where productive dialogue can happen, including with activists. The group was very concerned about the behavior of a minority of activists at the Bangkok conference who destroyed property and shut down sessions. Industry representatives would like to be more involved in the planning of the conferences. Several ideas for promoting dialogue on key topics were proposed. The group encouraged IAS to do a survey of industry partners. It was also suggested that another industry consultation be held in the future, perhaps at the upcoming conference in Rio.

Action Steps

- ❑ IAS will do a survey of industry partners and maintain communication with industry about the Future Directions process.
- ❑ IAS will hold a consultation and several individual interviews with activists over the coming weeks and seek to identify solutions to concerns that have been raised.
- ❑ IAS will consider expanding representation of industry in IAC planning bodies.
- ❑ IAS will consider several suggestions for improving constructive dialogue at the conferences, including forums for interaction between activists and industry, and collaborative work around key topic areas.
- ❑ IAS will consider holding another industry consultation at the Pathogenesis Conference in Rio later this year.

Detailed comments, organized by theme (comments are from industry representatives unless otherwise noted)

Clarity on focus: “IAS needs to say what is the focus of the conference and then industry will decide how to participate and what contribution we can make. If the focus is going to be social, political and leadership, then our involvement is going to be different.” “Our marketing and other activities really depend on who is at the conference. The greatest opportunity for us is to have access to a lot of physicians at one time.”

Industry contributions and ways to participate: “There should be recognition of what we do; that we have a global reach.” “IAS might play a role in highlighting what industry contributes, perhaps as part of acknowledging the contributions of a variety of groups.” “We are an ethical R&D company; that’s what we do. We are not ‘capacity builders’.” “We need to get industry scientists more involved; this is one way to demonstrate industry’s contribution.” “Maybe industry is helping make the conference a circus; maybe our exhibition stands encourage that atmosphere and should not be there.” “Having Hank McKinnell, CEO of Pfizer, was a great way for industry to participate. He met with all kinds of groups.” Another company is considering sending their CEO. “The satellites have been well attended and they are another good means for us to get our message out.” *IAS representative:* “We could point to the educational work of industry. Scholarships (including scholarships to scientists) for the conference might be tied to industry contributions.”

Increasing the presence of high quality science: “There should be more of a balance between science and policy. There should be more of a science focus, in part for consumption by the media. And science is our key competency.” “It is problematic to mix the science and political/social tracks in one conference. Now the conference is a hybrid animal and we are not sure what to do with it.” “Where the Conference is held is key – when it’s in a country of the North more scientists will come.” “In Durban we had scientific debates and that worked well.” “Another way to improve the quality of the scientific abstracts is to raise the bar for acceptance.” “We want the best scientists; it doesn’t matter whether they are young or old.” *IAS representative:* “One idea is to invite high profile scientists in advance to attract others.”

Interaction between groups: “We need to foster interaction between groups, rather than have a fight or a circus. We need a format where both sides are able to learn from each other.” *IAS representative:* “The Conference should not separate scientists from others. This is an opportunity for scientists to learn about other aspects of the epidemic.”

Working with activists: “There was a dialogue with activists before the Bangkok Conference, but they did not keep their word. But it is a small group of activists that cause the property destruction and shut down sessions. There is no accountability for the disruptions. How do you empower the constructive people?” “Activists have a role in policing themselves, and IAS should work with the community to encourage this.” “Why should a company be involved in a conference where the name of the company is

trashed? That is no longer acceptable.” “The media latches on to the sensationalism, the conflict, at the conference.” “We do have productive dialogue with activists outside of the conferences (even with Act Up Paris). What we need at the conferences is more productive dialogue, elimination of destructive behaviors, and open debate. The conference needs to be a ‘forum of respect’.”

Involvement in planning: “We want to work in partnership. It would be good for industry to be part of a planning group for the conference that involves activists and others. This would give us more direct input. Right now we are not really involved in planning.” “We do not have a place at the COC or other planning bodies. We have been asking for this for ten years.”

Ideas for moving forward: A) “IAS should survey industry asking what are the five topics we most want to see discussed at the conference.” B) “If we create a space for constructive dialogue between industry and community then it is harder for people to say they did not have access to industry. Dublin would be a good place to pilot discussions between industry and community.” C) “Industry representatives could chair conference sessions, for example on access models.” D) “IAS could bring together groups of people to address key issues, like the ethics of biomedical research. We will not agree on everything, but we could build consensus in many areas.” (*IAS representative:* “Consensus means setting parameters, not necessarily agreeing on every detail.”) “The consensus could be worked on in advance of the conference and announced there”. E) “The tracks should be separate, but there should be summaries of each track that are communicated to everyone. The Rapporteur sessions are popular, and we should build on those.”

Future meetings: “It would be good to have another industry meeting at Rio, but we will need legal advice to ensure we are not accused of anti-competitive behavior.”

IAS appreciates the frank, friendly and sincere atmosphere that prevailed during the discussion, and we look forward to future meetings with industry partners.