



TO: Gill Slaughter, *Operations Director*
Turners Conferences

FROM: Kira Everhart-Valentin, *Program Coordinator*
Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Collaborative Research on Sorghum and Millet

Dear Gill and team,

September 27, 2018

As we approach the final wrap-up of the various event details that mark the close to the *Sorghum in the 21st Century* global sorghum conference, I wanted to extend our sincere thanks to the entire team at Turners Conferences for their professionalism, organization and leadership in the planning and execution of this very important event.

When the decision was made to hire an event coordination company for the 2018 global sorghum conference that our program would be organizing, Turners Conferences came highly recommended. Our South African colleagues, John and Janet Taylor, both had previous positive experiences with your services through their involvement in SAAFoST events and activities. Following our initial scouting visit that you and your team facilitated, it was clear that you would provide excellent service to assist us in our large task at hand.

We were immensely appreciative of your company's patience and willingness to commence activities despite the fact that the contract required considerable time to process through our university's rigorous (and rather slow) process. Your flexibility and ability to sign on our behalf in order to process payments to service providers was also a key factor in the execution of the conference.

From the first stages of planning, our team has always been extremely impressed by the professionalism, responsiveness and customer service demonstrated by Turners Conferences. Your expertise in all the various aspects of conference planning within South Africa gave us the guidance and peace of mind in knowing that every major issue was being attended to, despite the fact that our organizing and planning committees were located across the globe. You provided us with a planning structure that helped ensure that we were considering all major logistical details – even those that we did not realize existed – which allowed us to focus our planning energies to the greatest extent on the scientific programme and associated activities.

The strong professional relationships that your company and staff have built with other key players in the tourism/conferencing industries (service providers, government agencies, etc.) proved very valuable to our efforts, whether it be through a streamlined AV/IT system that kept all concurrent presentations running smoothly, or making the necessary call to immigration services to assist our East and West African participants in obtaining their visas and therefore assuring their participation.



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Perhaps one of the most exciting surprises was the fact that your team took it upon themselves to request conference support through the SANCB, which was approved shortly before the conference took place. The support offered by SANCB was substantial and proved extremely helpful to our organization in covering the necessary costs to execute the conference, particularly in light of the fact that we are a grant-funded research program on a tight budget with very limited resources for activities of this nature.

When the conference dates rolled around after a long (but supercharged) year of planning and preparation, your team was there in full force and it made an extraordinary difference. Each individual had his or her area of responsibility and expertise, and were entirely prepared to handle whatever came their way. This provided the conference with a smooth flow no matter what challenges arose. Delegates repeatedly expressed their very positive feedback of the execution of the event and were highly complimentary of the organization and customer service. Additionally, having the Turners Conferences team on-site in such strength allowed for those on the organizing committee to integrate with the participants and focus their energies on networking and experiencing the event itself, which was a very valuable benefit.

We want to thank you again for the opportunity to work with your company and for everything you did to help us in accomplishing such an exciting feat. It was a very beneficial event for the global sorghum community and we look forward to seeing what additional partnerships and networks expand as a result. We will be sure to share our very positive experience with our colleagues and contacts, and should we return to South Africa to organize another event, you can be sure that we will be calling you.

Sincerely,

Kira Everhart-Valentin
Program Coordinator
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