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TEXAS TOURISM AND RECREATION INFORMATION PROGRAM
(TTRIP)

BY

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ABSTRACT

TTRIP is a cooperative program of Texas A&M University, the Texas Agricultural Experiment, the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, and the University of Houston's Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management. The mission of TTRIP is to contribute to the long-term economic growth of Texas through tourism research and development. In achieving this objective, TTRIP uses a conceptual model based systems approach.

TEXAS TOURISM AND RECREATION INFORMATION PROGRAM
(TTRIP)

The Department of Recreation and Parks in 1987 launched the Texas Tourism and Recreation Information Program (TTRIP) as a coordinated research and information service for the tourism industry. TTRIP is a cooperative program of Texas A&M University, the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, and the University of Houston's Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management.

TTRIP is housed within Francis Hall at Texas A&M University. The facilities include supermicrocomputers, large mass storage devices for data, a graphics lab and sophisticated computer peripherals. TTRIP scientists are also supported by four post-doctoral researchers, a microcomputer specialist with a degree in computer science, a desktop publishing specialist with eight years of experience in newspaper publishing, and clerical staff. The Hilton College has a complementary TTRIP facility at the University of Houston that is linked to the TTRIP facility at Texas A&M University.

PROGRAM

The mission of TTRIP is to contribute to the long-term economic

growth of Texas through tourism research and development. TTRIP research focuses on providing the tourism industry with scientifically reliable and up-to-date information to aid it in making management and investment decisions. TTRIP development efforts focus on continuing education programs for tourism professionals, technical assistance to local communities and tourism businesses, and research.

TTRIP is currently pursuing three major tourism initiatives that address the organization's research and development mission. The first TTRIP initiative is to identify new domestic and foreign markets, and marketing strategies, to exploit the state's recreation and tourism resources. The second TTRIP initiative is to document user satisfaction, and the economic impacts of recreation and tourism, in order to improve management and investment decisions. The final TTRIP initiative is to enhance existing recreation and tourism products, and develop new packages of products and services, that will expand tourism markets. This information will be disseminated to state agencies, communities and tourism businesses through TTRIP publications, a subscription service, a computer bulletin board, workshops, conferences, training programs and technical assistance programs. TTRIP is closely associated with the strategic planning efforts of the State of Texas.

FUNCTIONS OF TTRIP

To perform its mission TTRIP operates in three functional areas:

- A. Research
- B. Information Management and Reporting
- C. Education and Local Assistance

These three functional areas operate in concert to create research, information and education programs that address recreation and tourism industry needs. TTRIP seeks to:

1. Identify tourism and recreation information needs through needs assessments of industry clientele, government, other organizations and advisory groups.

2. Cooperate with other institutions, associations and private organizations in responding to research questions and identified information needs of the industry.

3. Conduct research and develop information management and dissemination systems, and educational programs, that respond to industry needs.

- A. RESEARCH : This function involves the collection, analysis and interpretation of tourism and recreation data to address research questions. Research initially, but not exclusively, is targeted toward the following initiatives.

1. Characterize the structure of the tourism and recreation industry and monitor changes over time, including projections of future changes.

2. Define existing markets and reveal hidden markets for tourism and recreation products or services. Rural areas, the gulf coast and inland waterways receives initial priority.

3. Establish criteria for the development of market-oriented tourism and recreation enterprises, and develop estimates of economic, social and biophysical impacts to guide investment decisions.

4. Integrate tourism and recreation into overall land management strategies.

5. Develop marketing strategies to exploit the state's tourism and recreation resources, including underutilized accomodation capacity.

6. Identify legal, social and biophysical constraints that are limiting the development of tourism and recreation enterprises in Texas, including problems of accessibility (transportation linkages).

B. INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING : This function involves identifying, collecting and organizing data known to be important to decision makers within the tourism and recreation industry, and associated government agencies.

TTRIP established an electronic data bank for the Texas tourism and recreation industry. This requires coordination and cooperation among numerous agencies and organizations. Goals of this TTRIP component include:

1. Identify, collect and organize data known to be important to tourism and recreation decisionmaking.

2. Synthesize, analyze and interpret information in response to specific industry needs and research questions.

3. Develop avenues of data access and dissemination to industry clientele and cooperating researchers. TTRIP currently publishes Texas Tourism Trends a quarterly journal, that is devoted to the trends in Texas tourism and economic environment.

C. EDUCATION AND LOCAL ASSISTANCE This function involves the dissemination of tourism and recreation information to clientele through publications, workshops, seminars, applied studies and local assistance.

TTRIP provides assistance to the tourism and recreation industry through the following educational and assistance programs:

1. Local assistance is provided in response to specific client concerns and issues.

2. Workshops and seminars are conducted on a variety of topics

important to those responsible for developing and managing tourism and recreation systems.

3. Special studies are conducted in response to specific clientele requests and needs. These studies require funding support from the clientele served.

4. Publications authored by research scientists and extension specialists are developed and distributed. All technical reports generated with assistance from TTRIP are published using the approved TTRIP cover and logo.

ORGANIZATION OF TTRIP

TTRIP is directed by an executive committee. The Executive Committee is appointed by the Head, Department of Recreation and Parks, and is comprised of a TTRIP Coordinator and two Associate Coordinators. Appointments are for a period of two years. Associate Coordinators are responsible for (1) research and statistical reporting and (2) education and community assistance. There are also two Associate Coordinators stationed at the Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management.

A temporary Ad Hoc Advisory Council is created to assist in the establishment of TTRIP by serving as liaison between TTRIP and the tourism and recreation industry. As liaison to the tourism and recreation industry, the Ad Hoc Advisory Council assists to, identify and articulate the research and educational needs of the industry. They provide strategic direction in planning TTRIP. The council also assists in locating resources to accomplish the research, reporting and educational objectives of TTRIP.

MANAGEMENT OF TTRIP

The Executive Committee is responsible for the affairs of TTRIP. The committee establishes an annual operating program and formulate contributing and support positions as necessary. The Executive Committee is composed of the following members:

1. Coordinator: Responsible for representing TTRIP, and administering and monitoring TTRIP operations, including coordination of three functional areas of the program. All public announcements and interviews of TTRIP personnel require the prior approval of the Coordinator.

2. Associate Coordinator for Research and Statistical Reporting: Responsible for information management, the development and reporting of tourism and recreation information, and the coordination of research activities.

3. Associate Coordinator for Education and Community Assistance:

Responsible for the preparation and dissemination of tourism and recreation information to communities, businesses, and individuals.

RESEARCH AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AFFILIATIONS

Internal and external affiliations with TTRIP are established by the Executive Committee. These affiliations are established as need, interest and resources dictate. Four levels of affiliation are possible:

1. TTRIP Associate: A TTRIP Associate title is given to major contributors to the TTRIP program. This title may be given to faculty or other professionals within the A&M system. TTRIP Associate titles may also be given to professionals in other institutions, and the tourism and recreation industry.

2. Research Associate: This title is given to those persons who are involved in post doctorate studies or can perform similar advanced work.

3. Research Assistant: This title is given to graduate students involved in research under the supervision of faculty. This title may also be awarded to specialized technicians, or others with skills that contribute to the accomplishment of TTRIP projects.

4. Resource People: This title is given to those persons within and outside the Texas A&M University system who want to be affiliated with TTRIP and who can make a contribution to its mission.

TTRIP APPROACH TO TOURISM RESEARCH

In approaching to solve tourism problems at local and state level, TTRIP has developed a conceptual model shown in Figure 1. As the model denotes, information needs must be identified through some process before evaluating data for its appropriateness. Several methods of needs assessment were identified. The desire was to utilize a process which would determine what information is pertinent, when it is required and what form is most appropriate to make data useful in decisionmaking. Also important was determining the "degree of resolution or detail" needed for clientele decisions. It was determined that a variety of methods would be required for TTRIP's needs. Advisory groups, Delphi, nominal group, and surveys were specific methods identified. The challenge was to narrow the focus of clientele to identifying their specific concerns for which they needed information. The heterogeneous nature of the tourism industry further requires segmenting information needs. Once these needs are established, specific goals and alternative strategies which will require information can be articulated.

The quality of information is only as good as its relevance with decisionmaking needs and the technique or combination of techniques used to solicit it. Time, cost, technical know-how, and desired outcomes are criteria that dictate the appropriate choice. For TTRIP, the nominal

group technique (NGT) was viewed as potentially appropriate for the program. The underlying reasons for this choice are: a) the paradox of the diverse nature of motives which commonly comprise tourism businesses and organizations, b) the need for collective marketing or product development initiatives for a destination or a region, and c) NGT as a method of group consensus, provides a means by which agreement on achievable goals and other needs can be achieved. Propensity toward group consensus NGT was felt to provide a means by which agreement on needs could be achieved.

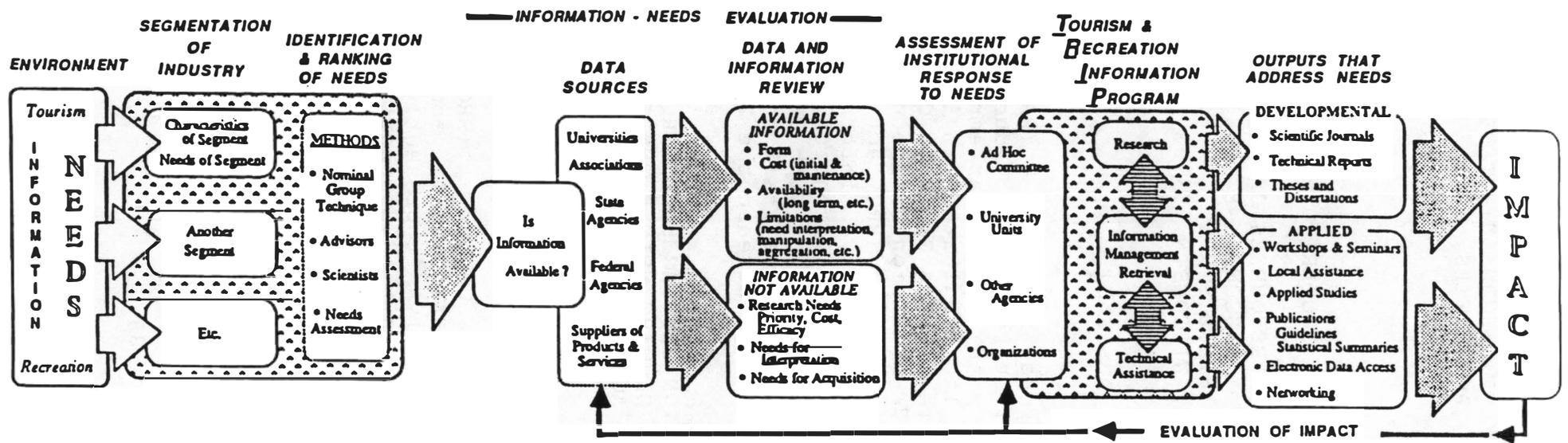


Figure 1. Texas Tourism and Recreation Information System Model