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EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONNEL IN
CONVENTION AND VISITOR BUREAUS

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to examine skills and personal qualities which are desirable for employment in convention and visitor bureaus and to identify employment opportunities. Despite a small return, it was found that there were employment opportunities available in CVB's. Sales level (professional) career opportunities were the most frequently reported openings within the responding bureaus.

Important skills and personal qualities for all employment levels were identified. Desirable degree areas and years of experience desired were also identified. Professional associations were found to be the primary source of training opportunities. University education and training offerings were geared to the matriculated student, and not easily accessible to professionals already employed in a CVB.

There is a need for universities to work closer with the professional associations to develop and provide education and training opportunities for individuals interested in careers in convention and visitor bureaus.

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CONVENTION AND VISITOR BUREAUS

INTRODUCTION

The expressed purpose of a convention and visitor bureau (CVB) is to coordinate local government, trade and civic associations, and private enterprise interests in building outside visitor traffic in a specific region. Convention and visitor bureaus (CVB's) have been established in both large and small cities to keep pace with the competition for the travel dollars. Although CVB's are significant players in the travel industry, there is little information available in the literature regarding CVB's organizational structure, career opportunities, and desirable qualifications for employment in the field.

The International Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus sponsored a simple descriptive survey in 1989 to "feel out" professional opinions on career opportunities and qualifications necessary for employment in the field. Although the instrument was pilot tested and reviewed by CVB experts, the survey was long (12 pages) and open ended. It was acknowledged from the onset that such a survey would be likely to yield a low response rate. It was further acknowledged that the timing of this survey would parallel the IACVB annual financial survey which was a required survey to be completed by all executive directors of member bureaus, further impacting the directors' time to complete both surveys. Despite obvious limitations, experts felt that the survey held face value due to its simple nature.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this investigation was to develop a basic list of skills and personal qualities which are desirable for employment in convention and visitors bureaus and to identify where training for employment in convention and visitor bureaus might be obtained. This project was funded by the International Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus.

METHOD

SAMPLE

Data were collected using a mailed survey. Surveys were mailed to the executive directors of the domestic membership of the International Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus (n=294), executive directors of the associations of the Convention Liaison Council (n=19), and the chairpersons of university departments of Travel and Tourism, Hospitality Management, Hotel and Restaurant Management, Recreation and Leisure Studies, or similar derivation as listed in the 1988 College Blue Book (n=103).

QUESTIONNAIRE

Three questionnaires were developed, one for each of the participating sample groups: convention and visitor bureaus (CVB); associations of the Convention Liaison Council (Association); and universities (University). The CVB survey contained sections on: a) Bureau Demographics; b) Desirable Qualifications (Skills, Personal Qualities, Educational Background, and Employment Experiences); c) Education and Training Programs; and d) Industry Outlook. The Association and the University surveys were similar in format but primarily requested information on educational and training opportunities available through the university or association.

Surveys were mailed on March 21, 1989 with a requested return of June 30th. A reminder card was mailed on April 7, 1989. The IACVB also printed a note about the survey in their May 1989, association publication encouraging participation and prompt return from the CVB's.

FINDINGS

RESPONSE RATE

Responses were received from 83 convention and visitor bureaus (28%), 11 associations (58%), and 35 universities (34%). Many CVB's felt that some sections of the survey did not apply to their bureau and returned the survey with these sections unanswered. This caused the number of responses to vary by question rather than by total number of surveys returned.

CONVENTION AND VISITOR DEMOGRAPHICS

Of the 76 CVB's which responded to the years of operation, the mean was 12.53 years. The bureaus ranged from 1 to 70 years of operation. The majority of the bureaus were operating under an independent bureau structure. The mean population of the service areas for CVB's was 311,238 with a range from 9,000 to 2,327,700. The majority of the bureaus (55.56%) reported population service areas under 200,000. The majority of bureaus reported budgets as being under \$750,000. The range for the number of conventions and conferences served was from 4 to 4,500. Only two bureaus reported serving more than 1,765 conventions.

Of the 79 bureaus reporting the number of professional staff employed, the mean was 6.93 professional staff. A typical bureau, when categorized by gender, employed approximately 5 female and 2 male professional staff. The average number of part-time staff by gender was approximately 5 females to 1 male. The most frequently listed departments were: Administration; Convention Sales/Marketing; Tourism; and Convention/Visitor Services.

The most frequently provided position titles were: Executive Director/President/CEO (63); Convention Services Manager (32); Convention Sales/Marketing Director (30); Tourism Director/Manager (28); Secretary/Bookkeeper (24); Administrative Assistant (23); Sales Director (20); Convention Sales Manager (17); Executive Vice President/Assistant Director (17); and Visitor Services Manager/Coordinator (17). The most frequently mentioned services provided by bureaus were: Housing/Hotel (29); Pre-convention planning (27); Brochure preparation (26); Registration assistance (24); Audio-visual presentations (23); and Spouse programs (17).

INDUSTRY OUTLOOK

Directors were asked to indicate their opinion of industry growth during the past two years and to project for the next three years on a rating scale of "rapid growth, stable growth, slow growth, no growth, and decline." There was an optimistic outlook presented by the responding sample. There were no responses which indicated a stalling or decline in the growth of the industry. The majority (61.67%) viewed the industry as showing stable growth in the past as well as projecting the same for the next three years.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Directors rated the employment growth of their bureau for the next three years. The overall response was that career opportunities for the responding bureaus would remain stable or experience slight growth (1 or 2 positions to be added during the next year). Service (non-professional) and sales (professional) positions showed the most growth. There were a total of 131 positions filled with sales level positions leading (54).

Of the 79 responding bureaus, 56 indicated filling a position within the past year. Almost 41% of the positions filled were new positions created in 1988. At the time of the survey, there were 57 new or vacant positions waiting to be filled.

SKILLS, QUALITIES, EDUCATION, AND EXPERIENCE

Directors were asked to list the skills and personal qualities they felt were important for employment. For service level positions, the most frequently listed desirable skills were: (numbers indicate frequency item was listed) attention to details (23), bookkeeping (9), clerical/computer (34) and follow-through (26). For sales positions, important skills included the following: industry knowledge and product knowledge (25), marketing (15), and sales (11). For administrative positions important skills were: administrative/association management (16), finance (29), leadership (14), personnel (16), planning (10) and public relations (14). Communication skills, human relations, time management, and professional appearance were important for all employment levels.

Frequently mentioned personal qualities for all levels were "creativity (47), flexibility (29), friendliness (74), honesty (62), motivated (63), and outgoing (31)." "Sense of humor" (11) was mentioned more frequently for the administrative level than the other levels while "service oriented" (25) was mentioned more frequently for the service level employment.

Directors were asked to check the desirable degree for each employment level. There was consensus that for administrative positions a four year degree should be required (63.41%). Directors more frequently felt that 4 year degrees were desirable for sales level positions (51.57%) but not necessarily a requirement. Only 16.07% of the directors felt that a four year degree should be required for service level positions. Advertising (72), Business (103), Communications (127), Hospitality Management (133), Marketing (139), Public Relations (84), and Travel and Tourism (99) were checked from a list of degrees as being desirable degree areas for any level of employment. The number of years of employment experience desirable for the administrative, sales, and service levels were 5 to 6 years, 1 to 3 years, and 1 year respectively.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

Professional training opportunities were most frequently offered through the professional associations (either IACVB or associations in the Convention Liaison Council). Many CVB's indicated that there were workshops and seminars available in the area of hospitality training through local bureaus or state tourism departments. Annual conferences and regional workshops were the most popular form of training offered by associations. Many associations offered professional certification programs to members of their associations.

Universities most frequently offered courses which were part of a degree program but were not easily accessible for those already employed in CVB's. There were few university courses identified which specifically dealt with CVB's.

DISCUSSION

From the responses provided, it appears that the directors of the responding convention and visitor bureaus felt that the industry could be expected to remain stable or show growth over the next 3 years. Further, there were employment opportunities available in CVB's. Sales level (professional) career opportunities were more frequently reported within bureaus. Skills and personal qualities were identified as well as possible desirable degree areas and years of experience desired.

The professional associations were found to be the primary source of training opportunities. University education and training offerings were geared to the matriculated student, but not professionals already employed.

Given the outlook suggested by the directors, it would appear logical to expect a demand for well trained professionals (sales level) and service level staff. It also appears that given the relatively few courses identified by the 35 responding universities there is a need for universities to work closer with the professional associations to develop and provide education and training opportunities for individuals interested in careers in convention and visitor bureaus.

TABLE 1

Program	Employment Level			Total
	Service	Sales	Admin.	
IACVB	27	48	67	142
Other Professional Assoc.	67	31	38	136
Regional Tourism Council	21	46	49	116
State Economic & Tourism Dept.	18	38	49	105
Regional CVB's	17	38	50	105
Colleges and Universities	13	20	25	58
