

Project to Research Tourism Opportunities

Research by Andi Coyle, 2001

Summary of Report

Background

Understanding the role their constituents can play in the region's tourism industry, the program directors of the Heritage Investment Program and the Philadelphia History Exhibitions Initiative (HIP and PHEI, predecessors of the Heritage Philadelphia Program) recognized the need to strengthen relations between the history and tourism communities. As a first step toward that goal, a study was initiated to explore existing opportunities and resources, which would then be used as a base to determine the most appropriate actions to take.

Interviews and Procedures

The first step in the process was to collect information from the various tourism promotion organizations (TPOs) throughout the region to determine their resources, assets and their experiences in working with HIP/PHEI's constituents.

The following key tourism and tourism-related organizations were identified:

Bucks County Conference & Visitors Bureau
Chester County Conference & Visitors Bureau
Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance
Greater Philadelphia Hotel Association
Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation
Independence Hall Association
Independence Visitors Center Corporation
Multicultural Affairs Council
Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau
Valley Forge Convention & Visitors Bureau

Because neither HIP nor PHEI work with any attractions located in Delaware County, no meetings were held with the Delaware County tourism office. Meetings were conducted with key representatives from each organization. Depending upon the organizations' missions and goals, this included the public relations staff, marketing staff, communications staff, sales staff, and executive director.

Goals and Missions

After meeting with several different tourism organizations, it became clear that each one has distinctly different goals and missions and interprets its role in tourism promotion differently. One CVB, for example, focuses in part on improving the product and provides funds to do so. While selling tourism product is the primary mission for each TPO, some have expanded their missions to include technical assistance and product improvement to their members.

These differences can be challenging to organizations that do not interact with the tourism industry on a regular basis. However, these differences also offer an exciting number of resources that, if properly utilized, could help improve constituents' products and marketing efforts and ultimately, their attendance.

The interviews with the tourism organizations revealed that they had similar experiences in their interactions with many of HIP/PHEI's constituents. While these experiences varied from institution to institution and from tourism organization to tourism organization, we were able to categorize their experiences into three areas of concern. We also noted that the causes and effects of many of the issues are interrelated.

The TPOs' responses were assigned to three basic categories:

- Allocation of museums'/historic attractions' resources
- Constituents' perception of tourism/marketing issues
- Quality of product

Allocation of Museums'/Attractions' Resources

Allocation of resources (including time, staff and funding) by museums and attractions was a consistent challenge in the relationship between HIP/PHEI sites and the tourism community.

Throughout our interviews, the following were among the most frequently discussed issues:

- Limited staffing resources are an obstacle to optimal communications between TPOs and attractions
- Quality, relevance and/or timeliness of collateral materials for promotion/marketing
- Limited technology, e.g., voicemail, e-mail, internet access, etc. and/or hours of operation affect TPO ability to interact with constituents
- Inconsistent or minimal hours of operation
- Impact of using volunteer staff for operations/tours/promotion, etc.
- Smaller organizations not becoming CVB members
- Lack of information from attractions about events, exhibits, etc.
- Lack of responsiveness from attractions to TPO requests for information
- Receiving information from attractions too late to promote

Constituents' Perception of Tourism/Marketing Issues

While historic sites and museums clearly understand their own goals and missions, they do not necessarily comprehend all aspects of the tourism industry, particularly the areas of marketing and public relations.

Some of the challenges the TPOs most frequently encounter include:

- Lack of responsiveness to TPOs requests for information
- Longer lead times for tourism industry than sites are accustomed to
- Little or no incoming information from attractions
- Need for attractions to better understand the importance of their role in tourism market
- Need for clearer focus and commitment among attractions about their interest in the tourism market
- Irregular hours of operation
- Need for constituents to become more active in creating packages and partnerships and to understand the impact packaging can have on promotion and developing new audiences
- Need for sites to increase participation with TPOs
- Sites' expectations of TPOs

Quality of Product

Competition for visitors and tourists among destinations is increasingly intense. This is compounded by the increasing sophistication and expectations of travelers. Citing these factors, the TPOs noted that if the Greater Philadelphia region is to be successful in luring visitors, the product must make continuous improvements that will meet the visitors' expectations.

The tourism organizations most frequently mentioned these issues regarding the quality of the product:

- Quality of product not competitive with current tourist standards
- Need for sites to have accessibility for group/bus tours
- Need to keep pace with changing market interests
- Need for consistent quality of sites' tours
- Substandard physical plant
- Need to expand interpretation to appeal to wide and increasingly sophisticated audience

Resources and Services Available through TPOs

Services and resources currently available to HIP/PHEI constituents vary widely among the tourism promotion agencies. Services provided through CVBs are available only to members.

Some key resources that could be available include:

- Inclusion in brochures and official visitors guides
- Web site listings
- Web site links
- Materials distributed/events promoted during CVB sales missions
- Leads from CVB's sales missions
- Inclusion in press mailings and information; familiarization tours
- Hospitality training
- Grant programs
- Membership networking events
- Photos and other materials for promotional usage
- Co-op advertising opportunities
- Research and statistical data

- Mailing Lists
- Access to influencers including concierges, hotel front desk staff and others visitors ask for recommendations
- Reduced membership rates for non-profit organizations

Although these services do exist and are available to most of HIP/PHEI's constituents, the recurring problem is that many organizations seem to be unaware of the scope of available resources and/or lack the internal resources to effectively use them. The most encouraging outcome of our meetings was learning that TPOs recognize the value that HIP/PHEI's constituents add to the tourism product and are eager to collaborate on ways to make that happen.