



Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events (T.I.M.E.)

Topic: CVBs - An Innovative Partner

Date: June 2007

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U. S. Library of Congress ISSN: 1539-1833

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## Welcome

Earlier this year, I wrote about building effective supplier teams ([BEST Teams - March 2007](#)). One potential member for a meeting planning team is a Convention and Visitors Bureau or CVB.

CVBs are great partners for executing meetings. This issue will more fully explain their role, their services and how they can create innovative meetings. I am happy to have Rick Hud adding to the discussion with his thoughts on why CVBs should be your first partner.

Sue

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## CVBs Unscrambled

A CVB is generally a not-for-profit umbrella organization that represents a destination. CVBs solicit and service all types of travel and tourism business. CVBs work to bring

meetings, conferences, conventions, movie shoots, sports and entertainment events to their city. The primary responsibility of a CVB is to deliver economic benefits to its members through attracting and hosting overnight non-residents to their area. Cities and destinations establish CVBs to:

- Help the long term economic development through the travel and tourism business
- Create an organization representing those businesses that rely on tourism and travel revenue
- Serve as an official liaison between the destination and meeting planners, tour operators and leisure tourists

CVBs have an interest in all types of meetings or groups and will work with you to bring their meeting to their city/area. CVBs will also help you make their meeting more successful through value added products and services.

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### CVB Services

The business partnership between CVBs and meeting planners relies on excellent customer service and support. Most CVBs offer services for free or a nominal charge. The services and support a CVB provides includes the following:

#### Destination Expertise

- Distribute Request for Proposals (RFPs) to multiple hotels, eliminating the need for you to contact each individual property
- Provide expertise on local products, venues and services
- Contact member suppliers (non-hotels) about meeting needs
- Distribute Meeting Planner's Guides with complete information on the destination and the CVBs members
- Access to local, industry and government contacts
- Suggest itinerary planning
- Act as liaisons to convention centers

#### Bid Development

- Develop bid strategy
- Develop bid documents
- Secure provisional room and venue allocations
- Coordinate and serve as host for site inspections
- Help negotiate with convention centers

#### Convention Planning

- Secure welcome letters, invitations and proclamations from the government, officials and agencies
- Book government officials as speakers
- Introduce local fire, police officials or other government officials to incorporate into the planning team

- Arrange for ribbon cuttings
- Book government officials as speakers
- Aid with protocol-related programs
- Arrange police escorts and other services from government agencies
- Provide local media contacts (newspaper, radio and TV)
- Control inventory control for hotel room blocks
- Provide online booking tools for attendees
- Manage overflow hotel agreements
- Arrange for VIP and exhibitor room blocks
- Confirm reservations
- Provide housing reports
- Arrange greeters at the airport or signs throughout the city
- Secure the space at a city's convention center
- Gain cooperation from multiple properties to work together with other hotels in the housing block
- Connect the meeting manager with a nontraditional sponsor from the local business base that might seek visibility at the event
- Outline various local taxes, home rule laws, ordinances, etc that will impact the meeting
- Identify other vendors and suppliers to enhance a meeting's success
- Assist with the names of local union representatives
- Provide contacts for, or directly coordinate side itineraries and special events
- Provide contacts for local security companies
- Provide shuttle service (potentially, complimentary)

#### Attendance Building

- Create customized presentations
- Draft news and press releases for a meeting manager's upcoming event or program
- Provide promotional materials (brochures, pre-show mailers, videos, slides, and photographs)
- Produce email blasts
- Recommend pre- and post stays itineraries
- Build customized web pages
- Market the destination through "prior-year conventions" to create excitement for the next annual event

#### On-Site Event Support

- Staff on-site support personnel including:
  - Registration personnel
  - Bonded cashiers
  - Data entry/typists
  - Phone operators
  - Hall monitors
  - Clerical assistance
  - Concierge clerks

- Provide visitors guides for attendees
- Provide attendees with personalized hotel maps
- Establish a courtesy/concierge booth near the meeting's registration area where attendees can make dinner reservations, secure tee times, etc.

#### Post-event support

- Post-event housing information on pick-up, cancellations and no-show percentages
- Survey attendees about their experience using various methods, including hand-held PDAs, kiosks and written surveys

The number and level of services will depend upon the CVB and the destination.

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#### Their Websites are a Wealth

The breadth and depth of services that CVBs provide may surprise some planners; especially those who are relatively unfamiliar with CVBs. CVBs rely heavily on their websites to provide information to potential visitors. Here are some of the features available on many CVB websites:

1. Maps showing hotels, restaurants, shopping and local attractions
2. Local entertainment options: list of options like shopping, children's attractions, popular attractions and sports
3. Links and resources
4. Fact sheets (often available in Adobe Acrobat or a printable brochure format)
5. Travel and transportation information
6. Information on history and culture
7. Information on holidays
8. Calendar of events often including trade shows and client functions, local events, sporting events, upcoming conventions
9. FAQs highlighting questions and answers to common questions
10. Documents and forms (especially for non-US locations)
11. Destination Planner's Guide which provides information on the destination and the CVB's members
12. Searchable membership directory
13. Media assistance featuring information to create media lists
14. Promotional materials (promotional videos, photographs of the destination, brochures, and pre-show mailers) to view or download
15. Public relations information or stock information for press releases that promote the destination and the various activities/events
16. Merchant awareness program details about welcome banners, street pole banners, welcome signs in merchant windows, and distribution of general information to merchants and businesses
17. On-line store featuring art, posters, videos, books, corporate gifts, postcards, local art and crafts and souvenirs
18. Speaker's bureaus that recommend local leaders from various disciplines, including business, education, cultural arts, non-profit and government to serve

as potential keynote speakers or panelists

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## Misconceptions about CVBs

Often people hold various misconceptions about CVBs including the following:

Myth: Bureaus are governmental agencies.

Fact: Most are not. Most CVBs are a form of a 501 organization. 501(c)(3) are organizations that are not-for-profit (including charities). 501(c)(4) are advocacy organizations and 501(c)(6) are trade and professional organizations. Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI) reports that 61% of CVBs are 501(c)(6) and 4% are 501(c)(3). Whatever a CVBs 501 classification, the staff of a CVB are not employees of the government.

Myth: Bureaus are middle men who drive up the cost of doing business with the hotel.

Fact: Most Bureaus' are "partners" with the hotel to bring your business to their destination through cost savings and value added amenities. They do not receive commissions or a fee outside of membership fee's where applicable.

CVBs receive a percentage of the room tax that is generated in their destinations hotels.

Myth: CVBs are only interested in conventions and city-wide meetings.

Fact: CVBs are interested in all types of meetings. Depending upon the size of the CVB they may even have sales people designated for specific markets (Association, Corporate, Sports, Tour Operators, etc.). CVBs are typically interested in any meeting with 25 people or more.

Myth: Bureaus aren't selective. They are obligated to distribute an RFP to every venue in the city, which leads to meeting planners being deluged with information and calls from unsuitable suppliers.

Fact: Most CVBs today have the authority to send leads only to those suppliers that meet a planner's specific needs.

Myth: CVB's exist to fulfill destination and promotional collateral and are not accountable for results.

Fact: Most CVB's are accountable for Leads and Booked Room Nights (often called definites). Their sales team works much like a Global Sales Organization, but for a specific destination versus globally for a specific hotel.

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## CVB Benefits

CVBs offer at least seven benefits for anyone planning a meeting or event. These benefits include:

- Time savings – A CVB rep can identify the appropriate venues, check rates and availability and present the bids back to the meeting manager usually within the meeting manager's required timeframe. CVBs have standards established with

their partners that allow them to manage a quick turnaround. Someone planning the meeting also avoids days of research and phone calls to suppliers.

- Financial savings – Time is money and a person's time can be leveraged by creating a partnership with a CVB. Many times the products and services of CVBs are completely complimentary. Also CVBs can work with a meeting planner to maximize value dates and patterns.
- Simplicity – CVBs can handle the logistical legwork. Many CVBs will also gather all the bids from hotels and put them into a standard format to make the comparison process much easier.
- Unbiased expertise – CVBs provide official, unbiased information about a destination's services and facilities. CVBs won't try to steer a planner toward a certain facility or tour operator that may be inappropriate for the event. Because they represent the community and its businesses, they can provide a wider range of information about facilities and activities than could, for example, a hotel concierge. CVBs provide an information infrastructure that aids anyone planning a meeting.
- Unique destination perspective – A CVB offers a unique perspective on the destination that can be very helpful to meeting planners. A CVB will know how to market the destination. The staff may have experience with groups that are similar in profile to yours. A CVB will have information on airlift, weather, other groups coming to the destination at the same time, and any changes planned for the destination. They have strong working knowledge of potential vendors or subcontractors. They can help you tap into local resources and relationships. They are experts at being creative in that particular city or destination.
- Faster decisions – Meeting planners are presented with complete, thorough information that allows them to make recommendations to management or make faster decisions.
- More intelligent decisions – CVBs can guide planners to hotels that might be more willing to negotiate on rates. Or, based upon their insider's knowledge, they can uncover hidden gems for planners – facilities that few out-of-towners are even aware exist.

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## Promoting Innovation

You may be wondering what role a CVB plays in creating innovative meetings. CVBs help creating innovate meeting experiences by:

- Adding uniqueness by suggesting "hidden gems" in a destination
- Freeing up meeting planners to spend time creating a unique meeting
- Offering information to attendees to customize their meeting experience - through side trips, restaurant offerings, recreation or local attractions
- Marketing effectively to your group based upon the profile and demographics of the group and their experience with similar groups
- Forging relationships for you with government officials, suppliers, and local

contacts that allow you to create more of a "WOW" factor

So beyond the benefits discussed in the section above, utilizing the expertise of a bureau will help you create an amazing meeting experience.

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### Secrets for Success

You will have more success with a CVB when also following these tips:

1. Start planning as early as possible – The earlier you involve a CVB, the more flexibility the CVB will have in securing meeting space and hotel rooms. This is especially important when working with a tight budget. The CVB can do more for you if involved from the beginning of the process. Just copy them in at the same time you send it to the GSO or Hotel direct.
2. Research the CVBs website before calling – Not all CVB's are created equal. Each CVB operates a little bit differently. Research the various services available through the CVB website before placing a phone call. Some CVBs will list the sales person responsible for specific markets on the website, also.
3. Make the CVB your first call – If a meeting manager plans to use a city or destination, call the CVB first. From the planner's perspective, the CVB has thorough knowledge of the hotels that would work best for the specific meeting specifications. Calling the CVB directly allows the meeting manager to benefit from their knowledge instead of calling hotels blindly.

A lead through a CVB follows a specific process. Leads received at separate times through the CVB and directly to the hotels "muck up" the process and create confusion about roles and responsibilities. While this should not directly affect the meeting planner, it may delay receiving a proposal. CVBs are often measured on "leads generated"; it is awkward for a meeting manager to expect the benefits and services of the CVB while not allowing the CVB to process the lead.

If you feel it is important to work through a Global Sales Office (GSO), National Account relationship or even go direct to the hotel, simply copy the CVB at the same time you send the RFP to also include the CVB in the loop (and the planning process).

4. Communicate needs as precisely as possible – Assist the bureau by providing specifics about the:
  - o Price range and budget
  - o Location
  - o Meeting space required
  - o Guest rooms needed

This allows the CVB to narrow down potential venues.

5. Provide a complete overview of all needs – By providing information about all meeting requirements (entertainment, off-site, spousal/partner/children programs, etc.) you will be fully leveraging the expertise of a CVB. Having a

complete overview of the meeting agenda also helps the CVB understand the full potential and true value of the business.

6. Look for unique offerings from the CVB – CVBs are very creative in their services. For example, the Greater Phoenix CVB offers a multicultural initiative to help attract multicultural conferences (and audiences) to Phoenix. The Greater Phoenix CVB works with local ethnic chambers of commerce and other partners to insure multicultural audiences feel welcome. Another example is Team San Jose, a partnership between labor unions, arts organizations, hoteliers, catering professionals, local businesses and the convention center staff, which serves as a single point of contact during the entire sales and booking process. The Northern Kentucky CVB offers an unconditional guarantee to planners using the Northern Kentucky Convention Center: If a group isn't satisfied with its convention, it receives a full rebate on a day's rental fee at the convention center.
7. Leverage Partnerships – Some CVBs have partnerships with other CVBs to help find the “right” venue in a geographic region. For example, in early 2006, in the Washington DC marketplace, the Tampa Bay and St. Petersburg/ Clearwater CVBs teamed up. Meeting managers have one representative representing both CVBs. Other cities, like Milwaukee, Portland (Oregon) and Pittsburgh have established partnerships that allow a meeting manager to consider different geographic regions for events that move across the country on a specific rotation.

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## CVBs – Your First Partner

A perspective on CVBs from Rick Hud. Rick has worked in the hospitality and travel industry for over 25 years. Rick was the VP Global Sales for the Puerto Rico Convention Bureau where he worked for 7 years. He is currently the Executive Director of the Lisle (Illinois) CVB. An active member in MPI for 13 years, in this section below, Rick offers his insight about CVBs as partners.

People on staff at a CVB recognize that a meeting planner has multiple contacts – potentially the hotel person on property, their National Sales contact and their Bureau Sales Person. Who's on first? Who should be on first? CVBs should be included in the sales process from the beginning if they are to assist you to their maximum capability. Because CVBs are not paid any commission to find a lead for the destination, it is more than acceptable to copy the CVB on the initial request for proposal (RFP) even if it is sent directly to the Global Sales Office (GSO) or property. We are a partner to the planner, to the GSO and to all the destinations products that we represent.

Bureaus are a:

- One stop shop
- Destination expert with an unbiased relationship
- Economic partner to help offset costs of
  - Collateral & promotional materials
  - Shipping

- Attendance building
  - On-site event coordination
  - Housing
- 
- Source for sponsorship or promotions
  - Much more. . .

Bureaus represent a destination and not just a brand or a specific product within the destination. When talking with customers, I make sure that I start each conversation by saying "All bureaus are not created equal and what I am about to say is what MY bureau and destination could do for you." Many bureau sales people come from the hotel industry and understand what qualifying questions to ask. While there are some bureaus that are required to send a lead to all of their "members", most bureaus are not required to do that. If that is a concern that would keep you from using a bureau's service, make sure you ask the question. Most can customize the RFP to your needs.

While the bureau sales staff sees destination members as customers, the most important client is the economic buyer or influencer. So next time you are thinking of the meeting destination, find out if there is a local representative that can help you expedite the process. Put the CVB "on first" to help create an outstanding meeting.

You can contact Rick, Executive Director of the Lisle CVB ([www.stayinlisle.com](http://www.stayinlisle.com)) at (630) 769-1000 or [hud@stayinlisle.com](mailto:hud@stayinlisle.com) or just click here [Rick Hud](#).

### Freebies: Managing Information

While the internet makes it almost impossible to keep a secret, you may have a concern about using a CVB and being inundated with sales calls. If you fear...

Information Overload: If you are concerned about being inundated with sales calls about your meeting or event, you can request NOT to be listed on convention calendar.

If you fear...

Information Vacuum: The Destination Marketing Association International or DMAI – the association representing CVBs – offers a method for meeting planners to verify and track your meeting history. The Meeting Information Network or MINT houses over 34,000 meetings from 17,000 organizations including associations, corporations, military reunions, sporting events, and government institutions. It represents a unique collaboration between 150+ CVBs which voluntarily report detailed meeting history information on the events held in their cities.

You can ensure that your meeting details are listed on MINT by emailing the MINT Department to request your profile. That email address is [mint@destinationmarketing.org](mailto:mint@destinationmarketing.org) or click here [MINT](#).

The benefits of posting meeting details on MINT include the ability to:

1. Substantiate your RFP with accurate meeting history
2. Aid in negotiations by providing your space, room block, and start-date needs.

Your detailed historical room pick-up information can help cut hotel attrition costs by revealing exactly what your meeting has blocked versus picked-up in past years. These factors translate into higher-quality proposals tailored to your specific needs.

The Post-Convention Report (PCR) is the cornerstone of MINT and provides detailed information on your meeting demographics, contact names, room pick-up, and future bookings. You can avoid an information vacuum by ensuring that your organization's contact information and history is accurate and tracked in MINT.

### More Freebies

Want to understand the difference between a CVB and a DMC? Write for this month's extra freebie on Convention and Visitors Bureaus and Destination Marketing Companies at [sue@suetinnish.com](mailto:sue@suetinnish.com) or click here [CVB and DMC](#).

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### Future T.I.M.E.

Come see me in action at:

HSMAI's Affordable Meetings West  
Tuesday, June 19 & Wednesday, June 20, 2007  
San Jose McEnergy Convention Center  
San Jose, CA  
[HSMAI's Affordable Meetings West](http://www.affordablemeetings.com/west.html) or <http://www.affordablemeetings.com/west.html>

I love to see familiar faces in the audience. Please come and see me.

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You can hear a podcast on the topic of Entertainment (October 2005 T.I.M.E. issue) between Jim Grillo, Here's Chicago.com and myself. Listen now! Or if reading is more your speed, read the back issue at [http://www.suetinnish.com/index\\_files/Page568.html](http://www.suetinnish.com/index_files/Page568.html) or access the PDF at <http://www.suetinnish.com/Entertainment%2010.05.pdf> [The Ahh's, HaHa's and AhHa's of Entertainment](#)

If the toolbar does not appear, go to the Here's Chicago website at <http://www.hereschicago.com/> [Entertainment Podcast at Here's Chicago.com](#).

Here's what is included in past issues ([Back Issue Request](#)):

2007

Chaos & Meetings (January), Signage and Wayfinding (February), Building Effective Supplier Teams (March), Conference Centers & CMP (April), Visual Communication (May)

2006

New Year's Resolutions (January), Generational Differences (February), Speaker Suggestions (March), Building Bridges (April), Positive Posters (May), Cruises (June), Moving Knowledge and Talent (July), Relaxing Meetings (August), Keynotes (September), Podcasting (October), Unique Meeting Venues (November), Deja View (December)

2005

New Year's Resolutions (January), Brainy Side of Food and Beverage (February), Sarbanes-Oxley and Meetings (March), Visual Aids (April), Experiential Teambuilding (May), Emotional Meetings (June), Press Conferences (July), Green Meetings (August), International Meetings (September), Value of Entertainment (October), Copyright Laws (November), Deja View III (December)

2004

Branding (January), Audio Visuals (February), Networking (March), Strategic Budgeting (April), Sensory Meetings (May), Board Meetings (June), Leadership (July), Barrier-free Meetings (August), Time Management & Meetings (September), The Travel Experience & Stress (October), Voting Techniques (November), Deja View II (December)

2003

Everyday Meetings (January), Diversity (February), Problem Solving (March), Marketing Pre- and Post- Event (April), Entertainment (May), Balance in Meetings and child care (June), Mobile Events (July), Last Minute Ideas (August), Training Meetings (September), Unique Venues (October), Data, Information and Number Crunching Privacy (November), Deja View (December)

2002

Teambuilding Options (January), Promotional Products (February), Multicultural Communication (March), Outdoor Learning (April), Budgets and ROK (May), Creativity (June), High Touch Technology (July), Economic and Business Cycles (August), Successful Environmental Factors/Conference Centers (September), Return on Investment (October), Incentive Meetings (November), Resource Recap (December)

2001

Sales, Award Presentations (January), Change and Communicating Change (February), Open Space Technology (March), Adult Learning Styles (April), Trade Shows (May), Emotional Intelligence (June), Presentation Tips (July), Ice Breakers (August), Facilitation (September), Humor (October), Customer Care (November), Slack (December)

2000

Teambuilding (May), Green Meetings (June), Values (July), Minimum/Minimal Meetings (August), Evaluations (October), Politics (November), and Toys (December)

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