

NETA Legislative Forum
September 21, 2007, 2007
Kearney Chamber / Visitors Bureau, Kearney, NE

Attendees: Richard Baier & Joseph Young (NEDED), Dan Hoffman (Governor's Policy Research Office), Christian Hornbaker (NE Tourism), Marge Lauer & Luke Leibbrandt (KAAPA Country Adventures), Linda Rieke (Cass Co Visitors Promotion), Linda Revis (Sarpy Co Tourism), Renee Seifert (Grand Island/Hall Co CVB), Orla Kitt (Ogallala/Keith Co Chamber), Kaleena Reeves (Hastings/Adams Co CVB), Jeff Maul (Lincoln CVB), Dana Markel (Omaha CVB), Lisa Cox (North Platte/Lincoln Co. CVB), Roger Jasnoch & Sarah Focke (Kearney CVB), Mike Bockhoven (Stuhr Museum), Judy Andres (Cozad Chamber of Commerce), Ramona Joyce (Cheyenne County CVB), Deb Loeske (Columbus/Platte Co. CVB), Dave Bartholet (Boys Town)

The meeting started with Richard Baier updating on issues identified at the July 21, 2007 meeting.

1. Richard provided a map which provided employment in leisure and hospitality as a percentage of total county employment. This document will be posted on the NETA web site.
2. NASIC Issue – Richard indicated that they (DED) are taking this issue on internally with the department of revenue. He stated that they felt it would be at least a year before reaching the goal of having all business assigned a 6 digit code which will better help to identify those businesses that are tourism related. The group was provided with a compilation of 2005 & 2006 sales tax statistics by NE business classification by county. Classification # 72 (accommodations and food services) accounts for approximately 10% (\$2,326,051,680) of the 2006 net taxable sales (\$22,317,391,421). The question was raised if all restaurants were considered under the Missouri model, in calculating funding for the department of tourism. A compilation of the definition of the travel and tourism industry by North American classification system codes was provided for the attendees.
3. Liability - Richard indicated he had met with Tim Wagoner with the Nebraska Department of Insurance... At present they (DED) are compiling statutes from other states. Marge Lauer stated her organization had also been compiling statutes and had provided them to DED. Consensus of group was that a committee should be formed to take a look at all the statutes over this next year, and develop options to submit in the 2009 legislative session and make the issue a priority at that time. In the interim Tim will be meeting with the independent insurance brokers to visit with their members about how they provide insurance at the present. In addition to meeting with AON which is a secondary market insurer who might be interested in developing a secondary market insurance pool. NETA member, Pat Bridges, email was read to the group with her thoughts and questions relative to recreational liability and the impact of the legislation that was passed this last session.
4. Richard stated his department did not have a handle on what the small businesses look like that was mentioned as being in need of assistance. They need to know are they jobs or investment. What kind of incentives would the tourism industry be looking at and those would need to be defined. There is one program, he stated, under the NE Advantage program called the Microenterprise program that might provide a model for funding, the only caveat is that the program can only be utilized in distressed counties. He suggested a committee be formed to define the small tourism enterprise, what their needs are for assistance take a look at the Microenterprise program and develop a suggested program. Richard did state that the TDi grant are still available and they only had one applicant for this go around, and that applicant did not qualify. There is concern that this program will go away if it is not being utilized. Tom Doering administers that grant program.
5. Richard reported he had met with John Craig at the department of roads. He suggested we form a committee to read the regulations (in fact he recommended all attendees review the sign regulations) and come up with ideas for change or modification before a further meeting with John and the department of roads. These sign regulations are available on the NDOR web site. It was noted that roads does not have a centralized database of state signs.

6. Christian reported on marketing and promotion indicating the state will continue with the "who knew" campaign. In addition, there will be two new campaigns (intra-state and viral) that will be introduced at the state travel conference in October. In response to a question Christian indicated that they do not currently have a marketing plan for the state, nor are benchmarks established for performance, nor any data on ROI for state advertising. He reported the contract is up with the current advertising agency and they will be accepting bids for a new agency this fall. Christian indicated they will be looking at outside research for refocusing the brand and conversion studies in the future as they are currently working with RUF Technologies. Further information will be available at the travel conference.
7. Richard reported he had met with Games & Parks and they are currently going through the planning process. Tourism will be working with games and parks as they go through the process and they (G&P) have recognized that they contribute and should address quality and place issues in the spirit of cooperation with tourism and other agencies looking to increase the states population.
8. Richard did state that the department of roads funding is getting cut and we would probably see closure of some of the rest areas across the state. Richard did indicate the trend is anyway that less and less travelers are stopping at rest areas and they will be taking a look at the visitor center program. He reported they are compiling information on what other states are doing and finding that travelers are not stopping in the middle of the state, so they would consider visitor center only at the entry points of the state.
9. Questions on the CVBs role for economic recovery during a potential pandemic were discussed with Christian and Richard.

At the end of the update by Richard and Christian, the following NETA action items were identified

1. Read the departments of roads sign regulations, and identify questions for a meeting with John Craig (to which Richard offered to go with NETA representatives). This was referred to the executive committee to possibly be assigned to the education committee.
2. Develop a committee to work on reviewing liability statutes from other states that have been compiled and draft proposed wording for future legislation, with a priority push in 2009.
3. Let our county constituents know what has been happening at these meeting along with letting all NETA members know
4. Compile detail on what the small tourism business looks like, and what it needs incentive wise.
5. Contact out state Senators and up date them on tourism in this state.
6. TDI Grants that are available are not being utilized. Should this be addressed by NETA to encourage communities to take advantage of them and how.
7. What should NETA's role be in assisting the Department of Tourism in marketing efforts?
8. What position and action should NETA take on the future of rest areas in Nebraska in light of the information Richard gave stating some may be closing.

It was noted the next legislative session will start January 9th with the first bills being introduced. All bills will be introduced by January 23rd and committee hearing will start on January 28th. I was stated that 5 governor's agencies have their legislation almost drafted and will start looking for sponsoring Senator's in November. Dave will begin arranging meetings of the legislative committee to discuss the upcoming session. Currently, the legislative committee consists of Dave Bartholet (Boys Town-Chair), Mike Bockhoven (Stuhr Museum), Renee Seifert (Grand Island/Hall Co CVB), and Pat (Seward). More help is needed, please volunteer.

After a lunch break the group reviewed the Legislative Update on legislation we tracked during the last session. This legislative report will be available on the NETA web site.

Dave Bartholet asked for any new legislation to be addressed in the coming up session. No new legislation initiated by NETA looks to be addressed in the 2008 session. It was noted that the preparation for bills should be taken far in advanced to line up support, sponsors, and lobbyist. NETA at this time has taken no such measures for the 2008 session. Instead NETA will act upon current legislation being

introduced this next session and form opinions on and actively lobby either for, against, or take a neutral stance.

The committee took it on advisement that preparations should for taking on the liability issues for private entities in 2009 and also the possibility of looking at tourism grants being reallocated to the Department of Tourism for different marketing programs. This movement of allocated grants is a priority issue for the Hotel Motel Association for 2008. Dana Markel had volunteered to speak with the Hotel Motel Association on their reasoning for the change in grant allocations and report her findings back to NETA membership.