IACVB Establishes Conduct Standards For Bureaus

Dateline: Kansas City, Mo.

At its annual meeting here last month, the International Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus released new Standards of Conduct to be distributed to members.

The standards are designed to give all bureau employees some guidance to help them avoid allegations of misspending and under-performance that have plagued several high-profile bureaus over the past year.

"With the challenges some of our members have seen, there's a need for some guidance and standardization," said IACVB chief executive Michael Gehrisch.

Just weeks ago, Tony Vericella, president of the Hawaii Visitors and Convention Bureau, resigned his post suddenly after a state auditor's report criticized spending and accounting practices at the bureau. Also this year, Dave Whitney was forced out of his position leading the Dallas bureau after reports in the local media about the CVB's spending practices. And Dave Nolan is on suspension from the helm in Cleveland over similar issues.

"In reality, there have been only about eight to 10 bureaus in the news for this type of thing," said Spurgeon Richardson, president of the Atlanta CVB and the association's new chairman. "But everyone could afford to do some re-evaluation."

The conduct code has 10 points. The following ones (some stated only in part here) directly address issues raised in the three above-mentioned cases:

- Provide no special privilege to any individual constituent, nor accept special personal compensation from an individual constituent, except with the knowledge and consent of your governing stakeholders.

- Issue no false or deliberately misleading statements or advertisements concerning your bureau or community, any other bureau or community, or the convention and visitor industry to the media, the public, or any other persons, either affiliated with or unrelated to the convention and visitor industry.

- Refuse to engage in and/or sanction activities for personal gain at the expense of the bureau.

Other points in the code offered "do's" instead of "don'ts." For example:
• Actively encourage diversity through the inclusion of qualified people from diverse backgrounds, including but not limited to women, ethnic groups and racial minorities, and refuse to engage in and/or sanction discrimination on the basis of race, gender, age, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, physical appearance or disability.

• Build collaborative relationships with other bureau professionals and others for the advancement of the profession of destination management.

In addition to the ethics code, IACVB gave bureaus tools to address and prevent image problems by scheduling sessions at the annual meeting such as "Bureaus and Operational Audits: The Good, The Bad & The Meaningful," "Executive Level Communications With Your Stakeholders," and "Performance Measurement & Accountability: It's Not a Fad Diet...It's a Way of Life."

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