

**2012-2017 Michigan Tourism Strategic Plan
Service Excellence (SE) Committee Meeting
Bavarian Inn Lodge, 10am - 4pm, August 13 2013**

Agenda

1. Welcome – Sarah Nicholls, Judy Zehnder-Keller, Larry Schuler and Jennifer Zieger
2. Introductions – All
3. Review of Plan Process, Update from other Implementation Committees and SE Goal/Objectives – Sarah Nicholls
4. Defining “Service Excellence” and “The Pure Michigan Promise” – All
5. Review of SE Suggested Strategies and Identification of Additional Strategies – All
 - a. Work of the 2007-2011 Hospitality Committee (especially re. training/certification – Judy Zehnder-Keller
 - b. The Certified Tourism Ambassador (CTA) program and Greater Lansing CVB’s CTA experience – Julie Pingston
6. Identification of Metrics for the SE Objectives – All
7. Consideration of Prioritization of the SE Objectives – All
8. Consideration of Formation of SE Subcommittees – All
9. Preliminary Identification of Funding and Research Needs – All
10. Next Steps and Next Meeting – Sarah Nicholls

**2012-2017 Michigan Tourism Strategic Plan
Service Excellence (SE) Committee Meeting
Bavarian Inn Lodge, 10am – 3:30pm, August 13 2013**

Meeting Notes

In attendance: Larry Schuler (Co-Chair), Jennifer Zieger (Co-Chair), Kelly Brennan, Rick Hert, Julie Pingston, Julie Sprenger, Judy Zehnder-Keller, Sarah Nicholls, Anna Popp, Louise Smith.

Absent: Chris Shepler.

Welcome – Provided by Sarah Nicholls, Judy Zehnder-Keller, Larry Schuler and Jennifer Zieger.

Introductions – Made by all. Much emphasis of the critical importance of customer service in all of our front line venues, both traditional tourism entities (lodging, restaurants, shops, etc.) and more general providers such as gas stations, convenience stores and banks. Recognition that the PM ads may get people here, but service is one of the factors that determines whether or not they enjoy their stay, will recommend the destination, and will come back. Need to define what is special/unique about Michigan service vis-à-vis e.g., ‘southern hospitality,’ and to create a culture of hospitality across the state.

Review of Plan Process and SE Goal/Objectives – Provided by Sarah Nicholls.

- *Objective One: Define “service excellence” and “The Pure Michigan Promise” and share these definitions with the industry.* We all use both of these terms, but what do they really mean? Need to develop a shared definition of what we all mean by these terms. We can’t deliver on the promise unless we all know what it is.
- *Objective Two: Improve our D.K. Shifflet leisure visitor satisfaction scores and maintain a ranking in the top five states.* D.K. Shifflet tracks trip satisfaction and perceived value for money at the state and national level. US satisfaction increased from 7.8 to 8.4 between 2009 and 2011 (out of 10); MI satisfaction increased from 7.5 to 8.5.
- *Objective Three: Establish and increase satisfaction and intention to return/recommend levels among national and international visitors.* The D.K. Shifflet scores only apply to domestic visitors. The intent of this objective is to establish internal (MI-specific) satisfaction and intention scores for both domestic and international visitors.

Defining “Service Excellence” and “The Pure Michigan Promise” – Group engaged in a short exercise designed to elicit their definitions of “service excellence” and “The Pure

Michigan Promise.” Verbatim written responses reported in separate document. Summary of responses from reporting out included below:

What does “Service excellence” mean to you? What characteristics, actions, people or places embody your definition of a truly excellent service experience?

- The Platinum Rule
 - Exceeding the client’s expectations based on how the client wants to be treated, each person wants to be treated differently, listening/responding to what the client says and how the client wants to be treated (versus what you are typically willing to provide)
 - The “yes I can” attitude
 - Providing a “wow” experience
- What people remember, what creates a lasting feeling or memory
- Warm hospitality – a warm smile, a warm handshake – saying “thanks for being here” with a personal touch
- Knowledge of community
- Speaking positively of community and state, embracing what is positive and special about the state
- Providing a take away gesture (whether tangible or intangible) – a token, a thought
- Exceeding expectations
- Acknowledging that the guest is important
- Welcoming positive signage/messaging – “please do” rather than “do not”
- Clean, visually appealing infrastructure (e.g., adopt-a-highway programs, downtown planting programs) – shows we care about the guest’s comfort
- Well trained population that is welcoming and understanding of the importance of tourism and service excellence (in our gas stations, stores, etc. and among the general population)
- Our (MI) version of southern hospitality
- Positive/friendly elevator culture
- Hospitality should begin with kindergarten

Many of us use the phrase “The Pure Michigan Promise.” But what does this phrase mean to you? What would an experience that delivers “The Pure Michigan Promise” be like from a provider’s and/ or a consumer’s perspective?

- Finding kindness
- Pure – authentic
 - person, place, thing (pure people, pure natural resources, pure products)
 - MI products and resources
 - being green
 - giving back to local community
- “May your ... season ... sparkle in Pure MI style” (Kelly’s email tagline)
- Visual appearance/ infrastructure – first impressions critical
- Feeling, memory creation, shared experience

- Regardless of season, always a reason to return
- Kinder, gentler, slower pace

Discussion of image issues, especially regarding some of our cities, e.g., bankruptcy of Detroit. How can Detroit compete with Chicago? Concern that the PM ads tend to highlight our pristine natural resources – how do cities or other places that do not meet that image of pristine nature tie into those ads and deliver on that promise? Discussion of state of roads – many PM ads highlight rural/more remote locations which require travel on sometimes poor local/county roads – how do those experiences relate to the PM promise? Need to deliver on the promise at all stages of the travel experience – transportation, lodging, events and attractions, food and beverage, etc. Review of Longwoods image study – impact that viewing PM ads has on image is consistently positive for out-of-state residents.

Review of SE Suggested Strategies and Identification of Additional Strategies – A subset of suggested strategies as published in the plan document were reviewed. A multitude of other ideas were put forward during the summer meetings; those could still be reviewed and discussed at a future meeting.

Objective One: Define “service excellence” and “The Pure Michigan Promise” (TPMP) and share these definitions with the industry.

- Identify key words that define “service excellence” and “TPMP,” e.g., via an online survey of or focus groups with industry members. Group reviewed wording of exercise previously described and agreed that those two questions should serve as basis for industry-wide survey (see action items).
- Identify and analyze the service statements/models of other states/countries/businesses with excellent service records.
- Post TPMP on michigan.org and at all willing tourism entities.
- Distribute TPMP to all industry association, CVBs, Chambers, elected officials, tourism/HB programs, as well as via GZ’s weekly email.
- Encourage the creation of an internal PM ad that showcases TPMP (and/or)
- Develop a short “This is Pure Michigan” video/webinar and encourage all state department /tourism employees to watch it during training, orientation, etc., as a means of sharing and developing a hospitality culture.

Objective Two: Improve our D.K. Shifflet leisure visitor satisfaction scores and maintain a ranking in the top five states.

- Develop an ongoing state-wide certification program focused on “Delivering the Pure MI Promise” (see additional notes on the work of the 2007-2011 Hospitality Committee and on the Certified Tourism Ambassador (CTA) program below). Discussion regarding delivery of such a program – either need a full-time employee to travel the state, or need to target organizations such as MSU Extension, CVBs, etc. In the meantime, could survey the 40-50 largest/most active communities/DMOs/entities around the state to assess the existence and content of their training programs.

- Develop a “Delivering the Promise” chat-board where employers/ees can share success stories, best practices and training resources (books, classes, etc.). Noted that it can be hard to get/keep people/businesses engaged in these kinds of things, whether in-person (e.g., monthly mixers) or online.
- Develop a “Delivering the Promise” e-newsletter – short, statewide, weekly or monthly – containing service tips and statistics.
- Continue to include service-related sessions at Governor’s Conference.

Objective Three: Establish and increase satisfaction and intention to return/recommend levels among national and international visitors.

- Develop a short online survey. Recruit tourism entities across the state to participate, i.e., distribute survey link to guests. Track and publish responses by month, region and entity type. Discussion of how difficult it is to get entities to distribute surveys, and to get guests to fill them in.
 - Suggested items to include in survey:
 - basic socio-demographics and trip characteristics inc. purpose of trip;
 - level of satisfaction (on a scale out of 5 or 10);
 - intent to revisit MI (on a scale out of 5 or 10);
 - intent to recommend MI to a friend or relative (on a scale out of 5 or 10);
 - open-ended section for comments.
- Establish an annual awards program for entities that receive the highest scores.
- Establish a statewide international tourism forum to create a set of service pointers/primers for tourism businesses regarding international travelers.
- Develop an online diversity training related to high target nations including customs, basic phrases, etc.

Work of the 2007-2011 Hospitality Committee – Provided by Judy Zehnder-Keller.

This committee was established to work on implementation of the previous plan, it included Travel Commissioners and industry members. Committee worked with the developers/providers of the training program devised for the Superbowl (which was Detroit-specific) to develop a broader program for delivery throughout the state. Boyne City was first venue (~ 40 participants, \$40 per person), also took place in, e.g., Flint, Lansing, Crystal Mountain. Was very much an entry-level training, was not sufficiently advanced for many entities.

General issues with training programs:

- The larger and the branded entities (CVBs, lodging, etc.) understand the importance of this topic but they tend to already have their own programs or to have the resources to develop their own trainings if they so choose. Chain hotels have no choice but to participate in their company’s program, thus, there is little incentive to participate in a second one at additional time and cost.

- The smaller entities that do not have the time or resources to develop a program or to participate in pre-existing programs tend to be those most in need. E.g., there are comparatively few CVBs in the UP and they have large areas to cover. Cannot expect hourly employees to drive long distances to attend a training, especially if they are not getting paid to attend.
- Employer unwillingness to cover employees pay while they attend training. Little incentive for employee to go if not getting paid.
- Need to get the right people into these programs. Travelers talk to the people around them – housekeepers, store clerks, gas station attendants.
- Need to generate excitement about these programs, to create pride in participation among businesses and employers/ees.

The Certified Tourism Ambassador (CTA) program and Greater Lansing CVB's CTA Experience – Provided by Julie Pingston. See brochures distributed at meeting for more details.

This is a nation-wide program offered by Mickey Schaefer & Associates/the Tourism Ambassador Institute that GLCVB joined in 2010. Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids are also members. As of 2013, there are over 8,000 CTAs in over 100 communities (e.g., Anaheim, CA; Baltimore, MD; Rochester, MN; San Antonio, TX; Door County, WI) across 17 states. A program is currently under development for the entire state of New York. Participating DMOs receive a customized curriculum and a microsite; participants may use the designation CTA after their name and receive a CTA pin.

For GLCVB, the one-time set-up cost to establish the program was \$35,000, with an annual program maintenance fee of \$7,500. As of August 2013, GLCVB has graduated 800 people from the program at a fee of \$20 per person, mostly from area hotels but also attractions, cab companies, etc. Weakest participation is among area restaurants. Typically 20 students per class, one class per month, outside facilitators (including some volunteers) deliver most of the material. The initial training lasts 4 hours with an open book test at the end, and is based around modules that include all aspects of customer service and the customer experience (recommending attractions and restaurants, giving directions, etc.), also focuses on the value of tourism to the community and on area history and highlights. Annual renewal of the certification is based on a points system, points can be accrued by, e.g., attending a GLCVB CTA social or visiting a GLCVB member attraction. The CVB also produces a newsletter exclusively for its CTAs. This represents a significant investment of time and resources for the CVB, but it has definitely paid off in terms of creating a hospitality culture in the Greater Lansing community (“you are what the guest remembers”).

Mickey Schaefer provided a rough estimate of \$1 million to establish a Michigan-wide program, based on the identification of ten regions. Benefit of this program is the excitement around and national reputation of CTA. Problematic that regions would be large and thus drive time to attend might be long. Problematic that some CVBs have already paid their set-up costs, how would that be factored into the raising of funds within each region?

Again, the smaller and more rural areas do not have the resources to cover this amount, even if they pooled their resources. Better to start by encouraging the larger CVBs to participate in the program on an individual basis, and see how much of the state we can cover that way? Then could complement this coverage with the “This is Pure Michigan” video/webinar discussed above. Would need to be some consistent state-wide messaging within this approach.

Whatever approach is adopted, need to (i) make it accessible to smaller and more rural entities and areas; (ii) make it of value to employers and employees; (iii) put pressure on employers to have their staff participate, e.g., recognition not just for individual staff members but also for businesses (decals, pins, certificates, awards at the Governor’s Conference, etc.); (iv) encourage CVBs to champion the program, to encourage their members and others to participate.

Identification of Metrics for the SE Objectives – Metrics for objective two are clear – maintaining/increasing the D.K. Shifflet scores. Purpose of objective three is to establish and track metrics.

Consideration of Prioritization of the SE Objectives – Agreed that objective one should be the first priority, with goal of achievement of that objective by Governor’s Conference in March 2014. Then look at objective three since this will involve the development and distribution of a new survey. Objective two viewed as ongoing.

Consideration of Formation of SE Subcommittees – Group agreed that formation of subcommittees is premature at this point, especially given relatively small size of group. Will reconsider this option at a later date as/when appropriate.

Preliminary Identification of Funding and Research Needs – Not discussed in detail. Noted that there is a difference between small projects or activities that primarily involve data/information collation (which Sarah and Louise can handle) and large projects that will involve substantial primary data collection and that should be forwarded to the Research and Technical Assistance (RTA) group. Funding and research = important agenda items for the next meeting, especially if the group has any short-term data/research/funding needs. The RTA and Funding committees are in the process of preparing a call for preliminary research/funding needs (coming this fall).

Noted that there is no other state funding for plan initiatives; monies allocated to TM are for PM only (items such as GZ’s salary come from MEDC, not out of the dedicated PM monies). Some discussion of possibility/desirability of diverting a portion of future increases to other uses besides PM (e.g., a statewide training program), though also recognized that there is still considerable room for increase in spending on PM. Noted that Illinois spent \$55 million on tourism promotion/marketing in 2012, and that New York just tripled its budget to \$60 million. Competition between states for domestic and international visitors is increasing; states have watched the success of PM and are following suit.

Discussion of the role of the former Michigan Travel, Tourism and Recreation Resource Center (TTRRC) which has housed at MSU from 1985 to 2007, and of the need for data at a finer scale than the statewide datasets that TM buys (Shifflet, Longwoods, etc.). CVBs, properties, etc. need data and research at the level of the county or community, but these entities typically cannot afford to work with the major firms. Need for an affordable yet also financially sustainable source of data/research. Noted that Dave Morris (MEDC research) retires August 2013.

Next Meeting – Proposed that group meet again in October/November to review results of definitions survey. Plan for Sarah to present preliminary findings at November TC meeting, and to be able to present full/final results at Governor’s Conference next March. Judy is willing to host at Bavarian Inn Lodge whenever space is available. Larry is also willing to host at Schuler’s in Marshall. Doodle to schedule next meeting send out to all on August 15. Next meeting scheduled for Monday November 11 at Schuler’s Restaurant & Pub (115 S. Eagle Street, Marshall, MI 49068).

Action Items and Their Status –

Obj. 1 (definitions)

- Sarah and Louise developed the definitions exercise in which the group participated into an online survey. Distributed to all CVB directors, all association Presidents/Executive Directors, all MTSP implementation committee members, Governor’s conference attendees (2009-2013) and all participants in the 2012 MTSP summer meetings. Will also be shared by GZ in his Wednesday (Aug 28) email. Responses as of August 23 = 60.

Obj. 3 (international)

- Sarah emailed individuals who indicated special interest in a statewide forum on international tourism issues during last fall’s plan review period, to remind them of their interest, inform them that the PMC and SE committees are working on this topic, and ask them to start thinking about possible content. Intention is to launch this forum in the form of a LinkedIn page before September 20 TC meeting.

Agenda Items for November 11

- Review results of definitions survey.