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**Process Improvement Project Regarding Current  
Tourism Awards Offered by the South Carolina  
Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism**

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**CPM Project  
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## **Process Improvement Project Regarding Current Tourism Awards Offered by the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism (SCPRT) currently offers tourism awards at two events each year.

The following awards are presented during the annual Governor's Conference on Tourism and Travel:

- Governor's Cup Award
- Bundy Award
- Hospitality Employee of the Year Award
- Outstanding Tourism Student Awards (9 awards)
- The Fred Brinkman Award (not an annual award)

The following awards are presented during the annual Tourism Partners Forum:

- Tourism Ambassador of the Year Award
- State Park Ambassador of the Year Award
- Most Outstanding Tourism Event or Festival of the Year Awards (3 awards)

For the purpose and scope of this project only the Governor's Cup Award, Bundy Award, Tourism Ambassador of the Year Award and the Most Outstanding Tourism Event or Festival of the Year Awards will be reviewed.

### **BACKGROUND/HISTORY OF AWARDS**

The **Governor's Cup Award** is presented annually to an outstanding organization that has demonstrated a significant tourism-related economic impact on the state and local community

and which has markedly improved the quality of life for South Carolinians. The presentation is made by the Agency Director and/or Governor during the annual Governor's Conference on Tourism and Travel. Entries are submitted by local chambers of commerce, business and professional associations, attractions, facilities, and festivals or events. Nominations are judged by a panel of tourism leaders from both the private and public sector, led by the Agency Director. Entries are judged on any or all of the following criteria: the organization's program goals as they relate to the criteria; the direct and/or indirect tourism-related economic impact generated by the organization; how the organization used economic impact to improve the quality of life or economic well-being of a specific segment of their community, the community as a whole, or for the citizens of South Carolina; innovative marketing techniques used by the organization to create new or to expand existing tourism business; creativity in marketing strategy, message delivery, and originality and effectiveness in conserving unique community, cultural, or natural environment as a result of the organization's influence.

The **Bundy Award** is given to an outstanding local or regional program that is successful in extending the full benefits of tourism to the rural areas of South Carolina; particularly those which involve placing developmental projects in rural areas. The presentation is made by the Agency Director and/or Governor during the annual Governor's Conference on Tourism and Travel. Entries are submitted by local chambers of commerce, business and professional associations, attractions, facilities, and festivals or events. Nominations are judged by a panel of tourism leaders from both the private and public sector, led by the Agency Director. Entries are judged on any or all of the following criteria: the organizations program or project goals as they relate to the award criteria; the direct and/or indirect tourism-related economic impact generated by the program or project in the representative rural area; how the program or

project has used this tourism-related economic impact to improve the quality of life or economic well-being of a specific segment of their community, the community as a whole, or for the citizens of the state of South Carolina; innovative marketing techniques used by the program or project to create new or to expand existing rural tourism business; creativity in marketing strategy, message delivery and originality and effectiveness in conserving unique community, cultural or natural environment.

**The Tourism Ambassador Award and the Most Outstanding Tourism Event or Festival of the Year Awards** are given to an individual or organization that has provided significant leadership and achievement for the South Carolina Tourism Industry resulting in economic growth and improved quality of life. The presentation is made during the annual Tourism Partners Forum. The award is presented to an individual or organization by the Agency Director and/or Governor. Entries are submitted by any facility, attraction, promotion or event that was in existence or occurred during the previous calendar year. Nominations are judged by a panel of tourism leaders from both the private and public sector, led by the Agency Director. Entries are judged on any or all of the following criteria: demonstration of direct and/or indirect economic impact in the tourism industry as a result of the facility, attraction, promotion or event; illustration of improving the quality of life of local citizens in that area or throughout the state of South Carolina as a direct result of the organization's impact; effectiveness in conserving the unique community, cultural or natural environment as a result of the organization's impact; creativity in marketing strategy, message delivery and originality; demonstration of innovative techniques in creating new tourism business development.

## PURPOSE OF PROJECT

The purpose of this project is to review, analyze and provide suggestions for future SCPRT tourism award solicitations through process improvement. According to Process Improvement Enhancing Your Organization's Effectiveness, "There are some major benefits to be gained by making process improvement a part of your life in the workplace. There are also some specific actions that you must be willing to take if you expect to gain benefits. You must: take risks, educate yourself, be prepared for criticism, be open to change and try new and different things, and focus on customer and process." (Flanigan, Scott, *Process Improvement Enhancing Your Organization's Effectiveness*, p.11)

Past history indicates a low response rate for award nominations received through brochure mailing solicitation. Each year, award solicitation brochures are mailed to approximately 2,000 to 2,500 qualified candidates, depending on the award, in South Carolina. The table below indicates the number of award nominations received for the past 4 years.

	<b>Governor's Cup Award</b>	<b>Bundy Award</b>	<b>Tourism Ambassador of the Year Award</b>	<b>Festival and Event (&lt;5,000 population)</b>	<b>Festival and Event (5,000 - 15,000 population)</b>	<b>Festival and Event (&gt;15,000 population)</b>
2004	6	4	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2003	2	3	3	2	3	11
2002	8	2	5	0	2	10
2001	6	1	6	0	1	5
2000	12	0	6	3	3	8

The number of responses is very low for the numbers of nomination forms mailed. Because of the low response rate, a review of our current awards process to determine what modifications, if any, should be made is indicated.

The mission of PRT: “PRT encourages people to discover South Carolina through our parks, recreation and tourism resources in order to improve the well-being of our citizens, while sustaining our cultural and natural resources for future generations.” The awards program helps support the mission of the agency by promoting and awarding outstanding tourism resources, organizations and citizens on the local and state level. Improvements to the process could even more clearly align the awards program with the mission of the agency. According to Fourth Generation Management, “Every employee has a responsibility to keep seeking ways to improve the work they do. But management has a larger responsibility to customers, shareholders, and other stakeholders to manage those improvements. This means encouraging the development of best-known methods to improve results and to establish a solid base on which further improvements can be built. It also means using data and process thinking to focus on specific sources of problems and develop countermeasures. And it means adopting a shared framework for improvement throughout the organization, which both increases the odds of success for each project individually and makes it easier for managers to find ways to improve the organization’s ability to improve.” (Joiner, *Fourth Generation Management*, p.217)

SCPRT will certainly benefit from the findings and recommendations with future project success.

### **DATA COLLECTION**

The data collection parameters for this project were given thoughtful consideration in light of potential **sensitivity** to the issues being addressed. Sending out a mass email to all 2,000 to 2,500 qualified candidates regarding our awards process could create the

perception that PRT was not satisfied with the applications received, or had an issue with past winners. The most recent awards were delivered at the 2004 South Carolina Governor's Conference on Tourism and Travel held February 2-4, 2004 in Hilton Head. A mass email could leave the impression that the quality of the winners that were selected prompted the agency to review the awards process. It was determined that a telephone survey that would work well in this situation. According to Business Research: An Informal Guide, the telephone survey has many advantages: "it is much easier to take notes, tape the interview and use a script without the interviewee being distracted, the telephone commands attention and privacy and minimizes interruptions that can occur in a face-to-face interview, the telephone lets the interviewer come to the point quickly and establish a businesslike climate without the interviewee feeling rushed, and the telephone interviewing is the least expensive method of gathering data from geographically dispersed people." (Farr, Timm, *Business Research: An Informal Guide*, p.81)

After it was determined to use a telephone survey, the survey content was created based on questions and/or ideas regarding the low response rate for nominations. Open ended and closed ended questions were used in the survey. According to Business Research: An Informal Guide, "As with surveys, open ended questions allow the respondent to answer with more than just a few selected responses. A simple yes-no or other two-choice questions are closed-ended questions. Open-ended questions lead to answers that reflect opinion, attitude and explanations." (Farr, Timm, *Business Research: An Informal Guide*, p.74) The purpose of the survey was to determine the following: do we even need to change the process; are the amount of nominations received acceptable; who is applying for the awards; do the awards have prestige; overall

awareness of the awards; does the applicant have sufficient time to fill out the form; is the application process too cumbersome; is too much research and statistical information requested and/or is the process too complicated? Based on this purpose, a 10-15 minute telephone survey was developed.

That survey included the following questions:

1. Do you apply for our tourism awards?

*If yes, go to question #6*

2. If no, what are some of the reasons you have not?
3. How many weeks in advance would you need to fill out an application/nomination form?
4. How many hours would you consider a reasonable amount of time required to fill out the application?
5. How much information (project/event summary) do you consider appropriate for the selection process.

*Notes: Overview, impact/results/community service, innovation, creativity, unique character-are these appropriate questions?*

6. Suggestions to improve our overall process:

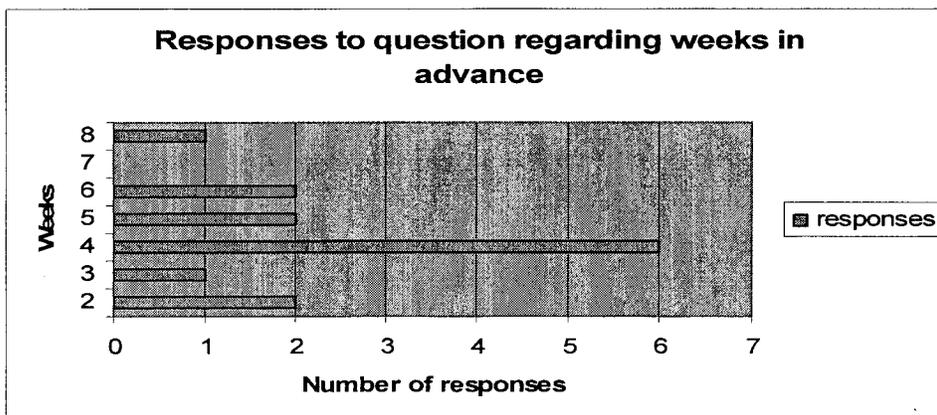
The telephone survey was conducted over a two day period. A total of 27 telephone surveys were completed. One person declined to participate. While this is a small sample, it was a good response rate. The responses will anecdotally provide useful information to make process improvement recommendations. Participants were selected from the mailing list. Participants were told upfront that the agency wanted to evaluate our awards process as a potential process improvement project. Overall, most participants seemed eager to assist in the endeavor.

*~10% of possible participants*

## SURVEY FINDINGS

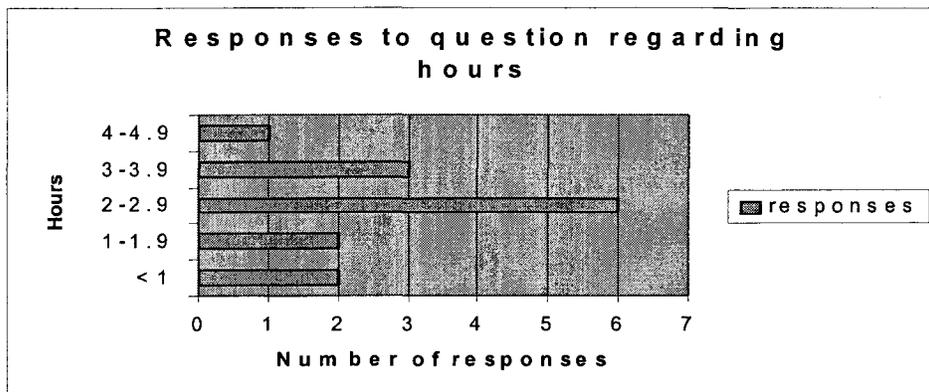
Reviewing the data was challenging and rewarding. It was interesting to learn from stakeholders who are, and stakeholders who are not, the reasons why they are doing one or the other. After reviewing the results, it appears that the number of nominations received for SCPRT tourism awards is adequate. The general consensus is that SCPRT is doing a good job with the awards program, but the process could be improved.

Roughly half of the survey respondents do not apply for any of SCPRT tourism awards. The emerging themes for reasons they do not apply for the awards include: they didn't feel their organization was large enough; not aware of the awards; lack of time; just starting to become involved with SCPRT; and lack of information regarding the awards. Of these respondents, they answered the question of how many weeks in advance they would like to receive the nomination form with a wide range of answers. The responses included a minimum of 2 weeks and a maximum of 8 weeks. The average of the responses would be four and a half weeks ahead of time that they would like to receive the nomination and/or solicitation form.



Responses to the question, “how many hours would you consider a reasonable amount of time required to fill out the application?” from those who do not apply, included again

another wide range. Two stakeholders would like to fill out the application in 15 minutes or less with the average of all respondents being approximately 2 hours. Thus, our future criteria should reflect the 2 hour average.



Responses to the question regarding award criteria, from those who do not apply, felt that the agency definitely should ask questions about economic impact, how they improved the quality of life or economic well-being of their local community and citizens of the state, and their marketing initiatives. There were also numerous suggestions on how to improve the overall process. Prevalent themes from the group who is currently not applying included: the need to make them aware of the award nomination process; need to recognize the Tourism Partners Forum award winners during the Governor's Conference; and send out the notification early. Some other comments included: put the application online; add who reviews the nominations to the solicitation information; and create an award for smaller communities.

Roughly half of the survey respondents do apply for SCPRT tourism awards.

Overall, these stakeholders find the nomination process relatively easy; they understand the importance of the award criteria; and they enjoy the excitement of their industry peers

winning the awards. They do however have suggestions to improve the process. They suggest that we post the application online; send out the application early; and follow up with media articles to increase coverage for winners; make some of the criteria clearer; create a second award for smaller communities; and recognize Tourism Partners Forum award winners at the Governor's Conference or move all awards to the Governor's Conference. Some other noteworthy suggestions included: have the Governor present all awards thus increasing the prestige; recommend that groups/organizations make oral presentations to the panel; and send out a press release to the South Carolina Festival and Event Association to post winners of the Tourism Partners Forum in their newsletter.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

The general themes point to several overall recommendations and next steps to improve the tourism award nomination process.

- Mail the award brochure for the Tourism Partners Forum and the Governor's Conference four to five weeks prior to the deadline.
- Review the criteria and determine which criteria will fall into the 2 hour average reasonable amount of time required to fill out the application.
- Create awareness of the awards among SCPRT stakeholders.
- Post the application online.
- Research the possibility of creating an award for smaller communities.
- Increase the overall prestige of the awards by moving the Tourism Partners Forum awards to the Governor's Conference, or at a minimum announce the winners again during that event.

- Present the awards when the Governor is present.
- Survey results should be shared with upper management to determine necessary improvement and if a future fall survey should be conducted.
- A follow up telephone survey should be conducted following the 2005 Governor's Conference to evaluate improvements made to the process.

## Appendix

### Bibliography

Farr, Rick C. and Timm, Paul R., (1994). Business Research: An Informal Guide, Crisp Publications, Inc.

Flanigan, Elaine and Scott, Jon, (1995). Process Improvement Enhancing Your Organization's Effectiveness, Crisp Publications, Inc.

Joiner, Brian L., (1994) Fourth Generation Management, Joiner Associates Incorporated.

## CPM Award Survey

Script- Introduce myself. Let them know that I am working on my CPM project and we would like to improve our award nomination process to make it easier for them to apply or nominate someone. Ask them if they have about 5 minutes to fill out a survey?

### Questions

1. Do you apply for our tourism awards?  
If yes, go to question #6
  
2. If no, what are some of the reasons you have not?
  
3. How many weeks in advance would you need to fill out an application/nomination form?
  
4. How many hours would you consider a reasonable amount of time required to fill out the application?
  
5. How much information (project/event summary) do you consider appropriate for the selection process.  
  
Notes: Overview, impact/results/community service, innovation, creativity, unique character
  
6. Suggestions to improve our overall process:

## CPM Award Survey Responses

### Questions/Responses

1. Do you apply for our tourism awards?

If yes, go to question #6

13=YES

14=NO

2. If no, what are some of the reasons you have not?

-programs don't change-criteria out of the normal-but plan to apply

-not in existence prior to this year-new facility/attraction

-not big enough

-won Bundy in the past, could not get Governor's Cup

-just getting started working with PRT-just learning about PRT

-not aware of awards

-leave that to your local business to apply for awards

-not knowing who is eligible to win

-not aware of them

-just now restructured, getting more involved with PRT

-lack of time

-don't feel like we qualify for most

-just never have a thought about doing it

-lack of information regarding, great deal of staff turn over recently-still learning

3. How many weeks in advance would you need to fill out an application/nomination form?

4-6 weeks

6 weeks

2 weeks

4 weeks

4-6 weeks

4 weeks

4 weeks

4 weeks

3 weeks

2 weeks

4 weeks

8 weeks

4 weeks

6 weeks

4. How many hours would you consider a reasonable amount of time required to fill out the application?

- 2-4 hours
- 2 hours
- 1 hour
- 2 hours
- 2 hours
- 15 minutes
- 2 hours
- 5-10 minutes
- 1-2 hours
- 3 hours
- 3 hours
- 2 hours
- 2-3 hours
- 4 hours

5. How much information (project/event summary) do you consider appropriate for the selection process.

14=YES

Notes: Overview, impact/results/community service, innovation, creativity, unique character

6. Suggestions to improve our overall process:

Yes responses

- do online-put nomination from online-turn in electronically, doing a good job
- pretty simple, need to define what is rural for Bundy and list in application, difficult part-hard to keep articles/photos (supporting materials) had to gather, what do we consider rural?
- some of the criteria is vague, not terribly clear, winners are a bit odd, good process, feel out in the sticks, not much point in putting work in-lots of competitiveness in coastal area
- don't send out at Christmas time, send out before Thanksgiving, more time to apply, small state agency can't compete with large companies that have resources, compare apple to apple not apple to orange
- difficult time consuming process-keeps people from applying, small guys don't have time to do application-time is an issue, 2 hours to apply would be ok, it is great that we send the application to everyone, we need to do a PSA in newspaper about the nomination process so we could reach folks who do not fit the tourism mold
- very general for small organization do not fit, need criteria for small venues/properties, could have 2 categories (one economic impact numbers over X

and the other economic impact numbers under X) this would give the small guy a chance, need better education about awards, could have more than 5 criteria or more requirements, send out late-don't have time, 1 month is not enough. Didn't feel we would win but wanted to go through the application process

- more time-hits you like a bullet, timing for GC award hard to get economic numbers data (end of year), some past award winner economic numbers seem too high
- don't know a lot about, only know about students
- little late receiving the form, get out sooner, access to previous winner applications to use as guides
- 3 pages allowed-too short, presentation should be made by nominees not just on paper, ample time to fill out application, cup is very prestigious-should be presented by Governor-not agency director-if so name should be Directors Cup not Governor's Cup! We should ask about taxes generated, what are the economic numbers, how does the event benefits locals not just tourist
- no suggestions-but do we only look at economic numbers
- past winner-made it easy to fill out application, the application gives the organization creativity in filling out the application, directions are very easy, could change the number of pages to include a front and back cover, make sure Festival Association receives the Press Release with TPF winners, add the TPF winners to the GC handouts or make announcement at the GC of TPF winners and have photos from the event, more recognition for TPF-need larger audience, much less recognition than in the past, miss not having the TPF awards at the GC-vital part of GC, could tell a big difference in the excitement of TPF awards compared to GC awards. Need more recognition and larger audience
- no problems, application on time, some criteria not clear, some confusion about Bundy award, limited scope who can qualify-how can you compete with a large community/or resort, no complaints with the award, more publicity after the event, PRT should write a feature story on winners and provide to media

No responses

- Governor's Cup most well attended event-give out with Governor there, would be nice if Governor would give out the award
- enjoy getting notification early, would appreciate advance notice and a reminder, are the categories sufficient so everyone can participate, it is always tied with economic numbers
- no comments-great process
- don't know who gets the awards, send to all CVB's and regions, need clarification on process
- would need to see application first (to provide feedback)
- making more aware, send info packet
- unaware of process
- everyone is so busy-too much paperwork in modern world-do form online, other associations do
- no suggestions
- no suggestions at this time

- who reviews the awards (add to brochure), use a standard application format, recognize TPF winners at GC-mention TPF winners, awards twice a year is good
- years ago many awards presented at GC-don't split up awards do TPF at GC, at GC industry peers present, more people would apply if made more significant, did apply for cup years ago-can't compete with entries that win, create another award for smaller communities
- regional or territorial (referring to if Charleston won previous year-they would not apply because they would assume Charleston area can't win 2 years back to back)
- no, not familiar with awards

### CPM Award Survey Responses by Themes

#### Themes from the survey respondents who do not apply:

- not big enough
- don't feel like we qualify for most
- can't compete with entries that win, create another award for smaller communities
- leave that to your local business to apply for awards
- not knowing who is eligible to win
- won Bundy in the past, could not get Governor's Cup
- just getting started working with PRT-just learning about PRT
- just now restructured, getting more involved with PRT
- not aware of them
- not aware of awards
- no, not familiar with awards
- making more aware, send info packet
- unaware of process
- everyone is so busy-too much paperwork in modern world-do form online, other associations do
- lack of time
- enjoy getting notification early, would appreciate advance notice and a reminder, are the categories sufficient so everyone can participate, it is always tied with economic numbers

#### Themes from the survey respondents who do apply:

- do online-put nomination from online-turn in electronically, doing a good job
- little late receiving the form, get out sooner, access to previous winner applications to use as guides
- more time-hits you like a bullet
- send out late-don't have time, 1 month is not enough.
- don't send out at Christmas time, send out before Thanksgiving, more time to apply
- small state agency can't compete with large companies that have resources
- small guys don't have time to do application-time is an issue

- limited scope who can qualify-how can you compete with a large community/or resort
- very general for small organization do not fit, need criteria for small venues/properties, could have 2 categories (one economic impact numbers over X and the other economic impact numbers under X) this would give the small guy a chance, -lots of competitiveness in coastal area
- some of the criteria is vague, not terribly clear, good process
- some criteria not clear
- difficult time consuming process-keeps people from applying, 2 hours to apply would be ok, it is great that we send the application to everyone
- we need to do a PSA in newspaper about the nomination process so we could reach folks who do not fit the tourism mold
- more publicity after the event, PRT should write a feature story on winners and provide to media
- make sure Festival Association receives the Press Release with TPF winners, add the TPF winners to the GC handouts or make announcement at the GC of TPF winners and have photos from the event, more recognition for TPF-need larger audience, much less recognition than in the past, miss not having the TPF awards at the GC-vital part of GC, could tell a big difference in the excitement of TPF awards compared to GC awards. Need more recognition and larger audience
- need better education about award, could have more than 5 criteria or more requirements
- Didn't feel we would win but wanted to go through the application process
- no problems, application on time, no complaints with the award
- 3 of pages allowed-too short, presentation should be made by nominees not just on paper, ample time to fill out application, cup is very prestigious. We should ask about taxes generated, what are the economic numbers, how does the event benefits locals not just tourist