



# Asheville CVB Destination Brand Development for Meeting and Event Planners

February 2013

# Project Objectives

1. Identify issues regarding the destination brand as it relates to direct sales to various industry segments.
2. Create greater alignment between the Asheville destination brand and the CVB's sales efforts.
3. Generate a specific brand positioning for CVB sales initiatives.
4. Recommend specific collateral to be used by the sales team.

# Meeting Planner Interviews

- Interviewed 12 meeting planners (contacts supplied by CVB)
- Cross-section of meeting planners—state, regional, national.
- About half either have meetings coming to Asheville or are looking at the destination for a future event.
- About half considered Asheville but went elsewhere.
- Feedback on:
  - Perception as a meeting and event destination
  - Barriers to hosting meetings in Asheville
  - Use of meeting planning marketing collateral

# Perceptions of Asheville as a meeting and event destination



**Those who know Asheville, mostly love Asheville.**

That doesn't mean they'll book a meeting here, but they'll consider.

Nothing trumps **specific client requirements** for venues and destinations, which vary greatly from planner to planner.

**Those who don't know Asheville** think of it as another destination amongst possible meeting locations, although some perceive it as being "different" without knowing why.

# Why were they attracted to Asheville?

- Combination of leisure destination with professional meeting amenities.
- Some attendees were familiar with Asheville and wanted to visit.
- Meeting had never been held there previously.
- Off-site activities for attendees.
- Central location for regional meetings
- “Reputation precedes itself” (unlike some destinations)

# What barriers to considering or booking Asheville exist?

- Lack of appropriate venue for their meeting or event:
  - Size
  - Location
  - Condition of property
  - Appropriateness for group
- Cost of the appropriate venue
- Off-site activities for attendees, particularly spouses, families
- Frequency, cost, and type of commercial airline service
- Lack of specific knowledge about the destination

# Meeting and event planner communication expectations

Prefer high level of customization in response to inquiries-- specific responses to RFPs that address their particular needs.

“Generic” destination collateral is only necessary if planner doesn’t know anything about a destination, or needs to sell someone else on it.

Selling others on the destination is becoming more important. Planners want a variety of readily available tools to entice attendees.

# Meeting and event planner communication expectations

If destination has a “traditional” guide, most planners also want in electronic format, due to their travel and need to share with others.

## Most desired information:

- Detailed venue information (Suitable for my needs?)
- Off-site activities relevant to my group’s needs
- Commercial air service information
- General feel of the destination (as a meeting location)
- Case studies relevant to me



# Meeting and event planner communication expectations

Some planners find DMO website to be just as useful for their purposes.

All respondents liked the Asheville CVB website, with some more effusive in their positive comments.

Most respondents spoke highly of their personal interaction with Asheville CVB representatives.

# Meeting and event planner communications at other destinations

*Anonymously contacted 20 destinations, to request planning info:*

- 8 had only online or downloadable materials.
- 7 had both online/downloadable and hard copy available.
- 3 had only hard copy.
- 2 had neither hard copy nor online/downloadable materials.
- Both downloadable and printed guides were 15-150+ pages.
- Some advertiser-supported, while others not obviously so.
- Some required a detailed registration to obtain a planner.

# *48 Hours in Asheville: A Meeting Planner Experience*



## **Not just a site visit with tour of meeting spaces**

- A visit that showcases the true Asheville destination experience
- Would you rather do this in a group, or as an individual?
- What if we offered 4 dates, and you can participate with the group, or with an Asheville host to customize your time?
- What do you think of including a 2-hour educational experience with certification credits?
- Would you want to bring a spouse/friend/significant other, and would you expect their expenses to be paid as well?

# Evaluating the Asheville Meeting Planner Experience Concept

## Concept universally liked.

- Being different from a traditional FAM was particularly appealing (and fitting for Asheville).
- Most liked idea of bringing spouse or friend, but don't expect CVB to pay (although some noted this occurs elsewhere).
- Split on whether they want to visit in group or as individual. Some saw benefit of sharing ideas while in a small group, but some wanted experience to focus on their specific needs.
- Split on gaining certification credits, with some noting they can get elsewhere or that it has no relevance.

**Consideration of Asheville as a destination**

**vs.**

**Consideration of Asheville as a meetings  
and event destination**