

March 6, 2015 – mark it down in your calendar. On this day, the meeting, exhibition and events profession took a giant step forward in defining a foundation of competencies that are based on the business roles and responsibilities event professionals provide to organizations. For the first time ever, our profession is being recognized by the US Dept. of Labor as a standalone business sector, distinct and separate from lodging and tourism sectors.

Just to make sure we're all on the same page, let's define sector and industry. A sector is a large segment of the economy, while the term industry describes a much more specific group of companies or businesses. A sector is also one of the few general segments in the economy within which a large group of companies can be categorized. So the accommodation and food service sector is the segment that is a generator of major revenue for tourism and companies within this sector that make up the lodging industry include hotels, motels, restaurants and casinos to name a few.

The events and exhibition sector is the segment that generates revenue, conducts business, and results for businesses through events, conferences, exhibitions, and meetings and a sampling of companies within this sector that make up the meetings industry are host/sponsor organizations, third-party agencies, specialized event and meeting organizers, convention centers and exhibition halls that are non-residential buildings, DMOs and CVBs.

Why hasn't this been done before? 1) Evolution of growing up as a profession and 2) events and meetings are a secondary activity of many sectors and industries such as: health sector – pharmaceutical industry; financial sector – accounting industry; construction sector – engineering industry so it has not been easily monetized, quantified, measured, and isolated data point. We ourselves have only been talking about meetings return on investment and

In the past meetings, events, exhibitions has been viewed as a supply-side economic production model. Which means meetings have been measured by consumption – consumption of sleeping rooms, food and beverage to name a few. We have shifted the view to be less logistical and more strategic valuing what meetings, events, and exhibitions create. Creating value for stakeholders, sponsors, and attendees.

Why is this important, how does it affect you and how did we get here?

8 months ago, I was contacted by the U.S. Department of Labor to join a team of people to review the Hospitality and Tourism Industry Competency Model. This model identifies the competencies – or knowledge, skills, and abilities – needed by all hospitality workers. The hospitality and tourism industry was defined at this time as including the following sub-sectors:

- Lodging
- Tourism and Travel Arrangement
- Recreation, Amusements, and Attractions

You see the same problem I did right? Where are events and exhibitions? Exactly, nowhere. I picked up the phone, called the DOL, re-introduced myself and sent them the Meeting and Business Event Competency Standards, CMP-International Standards and the Certified in Exhibition Management blueprint and told them these are the industry created, industry recognized body of knowledge for event and exhibition professionals. I called in my reinforcement - Marsha Flanagan from IAEE to assist me in leading this discussion and Boom! They ate it up and soon realized that the meetings, events, and exhibition industries were its own sector.

But all is not sun and roses. For months, Marsha and I talked with them about knowledge, skills, and abilities of event professionals but there were still gaps in the model that never emerged. Competency gaps like business strategy, event marketing, and technology. So we did what we all know to be the most powerful tool in our midst, we called a face-to-face meeting. On March 6th, I met with key staff from the Dept. of Labor to ensure that all event and exhibition industry data including current bodies of knowledge, certification competencies and job analysis data are include within the competency model and corresponding career paths and organized to properly represent meeting, event and exhibition profession.

What this means to the event and exhibition professional. It means having your HR dept. use job descriptions that actually reflect the knowledge and skills you have and work you do. It means having industry classification codes that truly reflect the body of work event and exhibition professionals do. That we are no longer put in the same category as lodging managers, restaurateurs, and dish washers to name a few. That curriculum in academia will include competencies beyond logistics and lodging industry. We have a career path that is based on not an individuals' experience and self-proclaimed expertise but rather an industry model that is recognized by the U.S. government, industry certifications, and practitioner competencies. We are starting to be defined not by what we consume but by what we create, what we do, and what meetings, events, and exhibitions mean to the economy. It's a good day today, March 6th, 2015. We never knew this would be such an important day in our lives. We hope you are as excited as us on the path and trajectory the events and exhibition sector is now on.

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