

Guidelines for National Endorsement of State Travel Counselors Certification Program

PURPOSE

This national endorsement program was established for two reasons:

- To promote travel information services nationwide.
- To encourage individual states to develop a certification program that enhances the personal efforts, skill and achievement of individual travel counselors direct and advise the travelers seeking assistance at travel information centers.

By publicly recognizing the value and professional quality of the services provided by travel counselors, the National Council of State Tourism Directors (NCSTD) believes that these counselors will be motivated to further develop their professional development skills. This will result in a more satisfied customer at the travel information center.

EXCLUSIVITY

Endorsement of individual state travel counselor training programs is available exclusively to NCSTD members and/or the officially designated state entity responsible for the state travel/welcome information center program.

REQUIREMENTS

In order for a state's travel counselor training program to receive NCSTD's National Certification, it must meet the following standards:

- The program must include a written examination, in a minimum of two variations to allow for retesting of those who do not pass the test initially. The exam may also be available in alternate formats if needed.
- Certification shall be open to full- and part-time travel counselors.
- Candidates must have been employed as a travel counselor for a minimum of one operating year.
- Candidates shall have no more than two attempts to be certified in any one operating year.
- The examination shall consist of at least 100 questions and require a minimum passing score of 85%.
- The examination shall include, but not be limited to, questions from the following categories:
(See Attachment A for sample questions)
 - Geography
 - History and culture
 - Attractions
 - Current economic information of state's travel industry
 - Directional information
 - Traveler safety
 - Customer service
 - Lodging and sources of additional information

Additional Guidelines:

- No category shall contain less than 3% of the entire test questions.
- Two variations of the examination must be submitted for review, and at least 50% of the questions must be different in each examination.
- When submitting an examination for certification, the submitter must indicate in which category each question falls.

State information center program managers must provide appropriate recognition to counselors who successfully complete the examination. Possible forms of recognition include one or more of the following:

- Special honoring of counselors at a prominent public event
- Public presentation of a certificate noting achievement
- Award of a lapel pin
- Recognition through department and industry newsletters, and/or news releases to the media

The state certification program should provide for periodic re-certification of travel counselors — not more than five years after the initial or previous qualification.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF NCSTD

1. NCSTD shall encourage states to develop certification opportunities that enhance counselor skills and knowledge, promote and reward individual achievement and heighten overall standards of travel counseling.
2. NCSTD shall review and endorse state certification programs every three years to assure that program requirements continue to be met.
3. NCSTD shall provide personalized letters signed by the NCSTD chair to travel counselors who successfully complete their state's certification examination.
4. NCSTD shall also provide personalized certificates to be given to travel counselors who successfully complete their state's certification examination. The certificates will be customized to the individual state and will include the signatures of the NCSTD chair and the state travel information center program manager.

NOTE

The NCSTD's endorsement shall be identified as a prestigious symbol of meritorious recognition of state travel counselor's individual professionalism and program competency. This national endorsement is intended to recognize the attainment of high standards of achievement, but does not in any way attempt to imply an assessment of individual state programs, and is not to be used as a condition of counselor performance or employment.

Geography

1. Identify the area of the state known as Cranberry Glades, giving the approximate boundaries.
2. What are the dimensions of the state from north to south? From east to west?
3. Name the oldest community in the state.
4. Identify the boundary line between the two time zones located in the state.
5. What is the highest point of elevation in the state? The lowest?

Attractions

1. Name three major theme parks in Eureka Springs.
2. How many State Parks are there within the state?
3. Where can people ride on the highest single-track railroad bridge in the country?
4. Name the mountain-to-sea hiking trail built by Santee Cooper, the state-owned utility company.
5. What area is known as the Antiques Capital of Maryland?

History/Culture

1. What is the state motto? (or state bird, state flower etc.)
2. While Texas maintained itself as a Republic, it had four presidents. Name them.
3. Where in Illinois was the first fort built by the French located?
4. List specific Native American names (cities, rivers etc.) still in use which reflect South Carolina's early history, influenced by Native American cultures.
5. Who was the first governor of the state?

Traveler Safety

1. Explain the safety restraint laws for all auto passengers.
2. What is the state law pertaining to carrying firearms in your car?
3. What is the speed limit on interstate, primary and secondary roads in the state?
4. Name the four things a motorist should do if he or she is involved in an accident while in the state.
5. Bicyclists are required to:
 - a. Ride as near to the left of the pavement as practical.
 - b. Ride as near to the middle of the motorists' lane as practical.
 - c. Ride as near to the right side of the pavement as practical.

Directional Information

1. The highways with even numbers go north and south, those with odd numbers go east and west. True or False?
2. A family is driving from Monroe to Lake Charles. Give the highway numbers they would take and list three tourist attractions in each major city.
3. What is the official scale of the maps of the 21 major metropolitan areas of Texas on the back of the Official Highway Travel Map?
4. Give directions to the nearest hospital (police station, service station, etc.)
5. Highways that have three-digit numbers indicate routes that go through or around a city if the first number is _____, or spurs into a city if the first number is _____.

Customer Service

1. A visitor wants to view some of the items in the display case. You are currently assisting two other travelers. There are two other employees working with you; one is helping an elderly couple and the other is at lunch. The visitor is getting agitated by waiting. What would you do?
2. Name five non-verbal communication skills.
3. During the first few seconds of a conversation, a good counselor should be able to identify the travelers' _____ and _____.
 - a. origin, destination
 - b. needs, desires
 - c. name, age
 - d. budget, attitude
 - e. none of the above
4. Name four steps to use in dealing with an angry customer's feelings.
5. If you are stocking brochure racks and a visitor asks you a question, you should:
 - a. Direct the visitor to another visitor information specialist
 - b. Pretend not to hear the visitor
 - c. Discontinue stocking and help the visitor
 - d. Continue stocking while answering the visitor's question
6. Body language and facial expressions convey our attitude toward our visitors. True or False?
7. You are at the counter assisting a visitor when another visitor approaches the counter. How would you handle this situation?
 - a. Politely ignore the waiting visitor.
 - b. End the conversation with the first visitor and assist the waiting visitor.
 - c. Look up, smile, and tell the new visitor that you will assist them in a moment.
 - d. Call your manager.

Economic Impact of Your State's Travel Industry

1. What was the Total Travel Expenditures for the state in 2011?
2. In 2011, international visitors to the state spent an estimated \$116 million. True or False?
3. Where does the travel and tourism industry rank in the state?
4. Travel expenditures directly generated over 361 thousand jobs in the state in 2011. True or False?
5. A total of _____ cents of each dollar spent by travelers goes to the state treasury.
 - a. 9
 - b. 3.9
 - c. 38

Lodging

1. How many Bed & Breakfasts are listed in the Iowa Travel Guide?
2. Name a local historic hotel/motel and explain its historical significance.
3. Explain the policy regarding making hotel reservations on behalf of travelers stopping at your information/welcome center.
4. Name a pet-friendly hotel/motel in the area.
5. List four area RV parks.

Sources of Additional Information

1. What is the name of the state tourism information guide?
2. What is the address of the official state web site?
3. Name three convention and visitor bureaus in the area surrounding your welcome center.
4. What is the number of a hotel reservations service in your area?
5. What is the 800 number for current driving conditions?
6. What is the Teletype Yoke (TTY) number for travel information for the hearing-impaired?