

Findings

from a survey of

**BC Tourism/Hospitality Programs
Industry Advisory Committees**

undertaken by



February, 2005

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1. Background

Industry Advisory Committees (IACs) are often the key mechanisms in which tourism/hospitality programs 1) stay “connected” with the industry’s current issues and trends and 2) receive valuable direction and input into program content and delivery strategies. Most, but not all programs in BC have such industry groups and some function more regularly and with a greater degree of input and effectiveness than others.

Recently, the BC Human Resources Task Force recognized the untapped potential of advisory committees and made a recommendation that a survey be undertaken of provincial IACs. Information provided by this survey would provide go2 and BC tourism educators useful information in terms of determining how to strengthen linkages and work cooperatively to build upon this untapped potential.

In response to this Task Force recommendation, go2 commenced this project to identify, and make connections with existing committees (both at public and private institutions) -- to obtain feedback and observations about their activities and the programs they serve.

The output of this intelligence gathering is intended to be used as a feedback into the education community (both at the institutional and policy level) to help identify what is working well. It is hoped it will also encourage discussion relating to ways institutions can strengthen their input from industry so the range of programs being offered throughout the province is well connected to current and future industry requirements

It is hoped that the entire BC tourism education and training community can benefit from information regarding strengthened advisory committee roles, policies and procedures.

While work has been undertaken in many other components of the BC tourism learning system, this go2 initiative will be the first time attention has been directed at IACs and these key industry-education linkages.

2. Project Objectives

- ❑ To request input from tourism/hospitality program coordinators on the role and functions of industry advisory committees – e.g. what works, what doesn't, successes, challenges etc.
- ❑ To solicit input from industry leaders serving on Industry Advisory Committees. This will also focus on obtaining observations and experiences on successes, challenges with IACs and their effectiveness in assisting BC tourism education and training programs in meeting industry HR requirements
- ❑ Based upon input, identify components of effective IACs and suggest strategies for strengthening industry-educator linkages through IACs and other means

3. Methodology

1. Developed project work team and commenced preliminary efforts to identify tourism/hospitality industry advisory committees operating in BC. The primary resources used were:
 - ❑ The *go2 Directory of Tourism Education and Training* (approx 180 programs, 45 schools) www.go2hr.ca
 - ❑ The PPSEC registry of registered accredited tourism/hospitality private institutions
 - ❑ Personal knowledge of some IACs that were not listed in above sources
2. Prepared initial working database (with contact information) identifying provincial IACs and which program(s) they provide advice to. Identified key institutional requirements relating to project:
 - ❑ Names and contact details of current members/chairs.
 - ❑ Meeting frequency
 - ❑ Availability of written guidelines
 - ❑ Stated mandate
 - ❑ Term of members
 - ❑ Years in existence
 - ❑ Recent key issues discussed by IAC – areas of contribution to program
 - ❑ Etc.

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- 3.** Prepared initial project information memo; e-mailed to schools with planned phone follow-up
- 4.** Telephoned each institution to determine key contact, existence of operational IAC, and permission to participate in project (2-6 phone calls per school)
- 5.** Commenced preliminary research (internet and phone) into effective tourism advisory committees in other jurisdictions. Identified examples of good advisory committees/co-management teams and obtained IAC operational guidelines if available
- 6.** Prepared a list of topics to help guide the questions to IAC members and program coordinators. Initial focus included:
 - ❑ Level and scope of involvement of IAC
 - ❑ Real and perceived influence of IAC
 - ❑ IAC knowledge of program curriculum
 - ❑ Knowledge of graduates and placement experiences
 - ❑ Identification of strengths and possible gaps (relating to industry HR requirements)
 - ❑ Awareness of and observations re practicum experience
 - ❑ What IAC suggestions have been implemented
 - ❑ Etc.
- 7.** Completed draft survey (using on-line SurveyMonkey service). With input from project work team, refined and complete final versions of two surveys – one for program coordinators and one for voluntary IAC members.
- 8.** Posted surveys on web-site and notified all schools that had agreed to participate, providing them with web site URLs – and a memo for coordinators to forward to their IAC members and encouraging them to participate
- 9.** Followed through with two reminder e-mails and one round of reminder phone calls
- 10.** Tabulated information received and present findings in draft report to project reviewers and/or steering committee
- 11.** Reviewed by project work team and final report produced

4. Survey Highlights

<i>Number of Programs</i>	Public Institutions	Private Institutions	Canadian Academy of Travel and Tourism Schools
# of post-secondary institutions identified with active tourism/hospitality program(s)	15	15	4
# of programs with active IACs and contacted re survey	18*	2	4
# of programs with “informal” advisory committees that agreed to participate	5	3	-
# coordinators that agreed to participate	23	5	2

* some institutions have more than one IAC

<i>Results</i>	
Responses from program Coordinators	20
Responses from Industry Advisory Committee members	23

- The participating institutions offered a range of certificate, diploma and degree programs in hospitality operations and management, tourism management and culinary arts.
- To encourage participation all survey results were collected anonymously. The large majority of institutions contacted were pleased to contribute to the survey and commented that they would look forward to receiving the results.
- A small number of schools were not able to be contacted in person, after repeated attempts, and did not confirm participation. One public institution commented that there were privacy concerns in relationship to their advisory committee and would not be able to participate.
- The IAC members who responded to the survey represented a good cross-section of public, private and secondary programs. Anecdotal evidence has suggested that the higher response from coordinators but weaker response rate from members themselves could be largely attributed to “e-mail overload” and the very full schedules of busy industry leaders. The total number of responses obtained, however (with the similarity in results and opinions),

combined with informal input received during the many project phone conversations with institutions, do provide us with a good “picture” of the relative effectiveness of BC tourism/hospitality IACs and of coordinator and industry member observations.

- A number of programs (both public and private) informed the project coordinator that while they did not currently have an active IAC, there was an ongoing attempt made to maintain close linkages with industry leaders. Some stated that attempts in the past to keep an advisory committee active had been challenging and that this informal input (regular lunches with key industry colleagues, guest speakers etc.) was providing adequate feedback and assurances that program content and performance was acceptable.

5. Key Findings

5.1 Anecdotal Comments

- For institutions with active Industry Advisory Committees, these groups of volunteer leaders are seen as an essential component of producing, and maintaining solid applied programs that are in touch with current industry needs.
- Many institutions have described their ability to keep a fully functional IAC operating as being a real challenge
- A number of schools are using “informal” committees instead, and have commented that this approach was proving to be effective for them, and they felt well served. Most private schools, and a small number of public institutions, contacted were in this category. See related comments in the coordinator survey findings section.

Presented below are the highlights from the two on-line surveys.

5.2 Survey of Industry Advisory Committee Members

Topics	Summary of responses
1. Range of Programs Represented in responses	56.5% Hospitality Diploma 39.1% Hospitality Certificate 34.8% Tourism Diploma 30.4% Adventure Tourism Diploma (including golf/ski) 26.1% Tourism Certificate 26.2 Culinary Arts 17.4% Hospitality-related Degree 8.7% Adventure Tourism Certificate 17.4% Other <i>* total over 100%: some IAC members serve more than one program</i>

<p>2. Length of time serving as IAC member</p>	<p>2-3 yrs. 33.3% less than 6 mos. 19% more than 3 years 19% 1-2 yrs 9.5% Other 4.8%</p>
<p>3. Ways IAC members are asked to provide input</p>	<p>95.2% provide input to ensure curriculum content is relevant to employer needs 95.2% provide information on industry trends and current employer/HR needs 85.7% assist with detailed review of course outlines/learning outcomes 85.7% serve as guest speakers 66.7% provide sites for student work experience 66.7% serve as advocates of the program in their community 42.9% serve as hosts for field trips 42.9% mentor individual students in program 23.8% offer assistance with supplies/equipment/facilities etc.</p>
<p>4. Estimated # of voluntary hours per year on IAC work</p>	<p>33.3% 10-20 hours 28.6% less than 10 hours 19% 20-40 hours 19% more than 40 hours</p>
<p>5. Ways IAC members feel their contribution has been most effective in helping to strengthen program</p>	<p>Most effective (rank ordered) 1. provide information on industry trends and current employer/HR needs 2. provide input into curriculum design 3. mentor individual students in program</p> <p>Least effective (rank ordered): 1. offer assistance with supplies/equipment/facilities etc. 2. mentor individuals students 3. serving as hosts for field excursions 4. serving as guest speakers</p>
<p>6. The kind of input IACs are encouraged to provide program coordinators and instructors</p>	<p>95% information about current industry trends 90% input into practicum/work experience component of program 70% specific details re course content so that it reflects changes in the industry 60% changes/trends in the hiring practices of their business 55% changes in HR trends for their sector</p>
<p>7. Percentage of programs represented by survey participants that offer practicum component</p>	<p>94.7% offer practicum</p>
<p>8. Ways IAC member describes effectiveness of practicum component</p>	<p>68.4% provides an excellent opportunity for all students; appropriate for the program 21.1% provides a good opportunity could be strengthened in some ways</p>

	<p>10.5% practicum/work experience could be developed further to provide a stronger experience for students 15.8% not sure</p>
<p>9. IAC members suggestions on improving practicum component of programs</p>	<p>Comment highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry practicum hosts should be dedicated to managing and supervising the student experience at all times • Post-practicum mentoring should be made available • Practicum should focus on management, HR and finance themes • Ensure students understand importance of their work experience. • Essential to effectively prepare students re work ethic, commitment to the experience and the need to represent their program in the most professional of ways • If possible, programs should consider alternate times for placement to accommodate the local business environment (e.g. winter resort hotels with higher seasonal occupancy during ski season – and ability to accept more students at this time) • Ensure students understand that entry-level experience during practicum is important in understanding the realities of industry • “I think things are highly satisfactory as is”
<p>10. IAC members suggestions on improving overall effectiveness of the IAC</p>	<p>Comment highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutions need to be astute regarding best ways to tap resources of members (e.g. meetings need to be short, focused, and with the opportunity for substantive input on topics that they have received a briefing on, in advance) • Those soliciting volunteer time should make frequent effort to recognize the contribution • IAC should focus on strategic issues and not on minutia of program delivery • Assist with marketing and “value-added” strength of the institution that having an active IAC provides • Consider appointing team leaders from the IAC (with areas of specialization) to focus on the maintenance of relevancy of programs to industry employment opportunities – on an ongoing basis. Consider payment (honoraria) for the extra research time and effort that these program “champions’ would need to undertake • Spend enough time with the IAC to get an adequate understanding of current needs

	<p>and trends</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage contact with students when IAC is there. Instructors should work together and with students to prepare questions in advance • Consider more frequent meeting schedule (annually is usually not enough) • Facilitate more involvement with students. Invite IAC members to student planned events etc., encourage more IAC guest speakers etc. this interaction is valued by students and alumni • “things are highly satisfactory”
<p>11. IAC members thoughts on the greatest strengths of the program(s) they serve</p>	<p>Comment highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures course content (diploma and degree) remains relevant and practical in the view of industry employers • Our program does listen to the advice of the industry and makes program changes to reflect IAC input • Is producing a future pool of educated, keen employees • Appropriateness of program emphasis (e.g. business); • Location of school • On-line components offered to the industry • Transferability of program • Provides students with a good foundation of skills for entering the workforce • It is very dedicated to ensuring industry relevance • The practicum component • It understands the financial realities of the industry and the way the industry has changed over the years
<p>12. Areas of program that could be made more effective (in terms of meeting HR needs of their business –and industry as a whole)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine ways to create a closer connection between graduates who are ready to enter the industry and employers; often students feel there is a chasm between theory and reality in the industry. Mentorship is good first step • Consider further development of trades connected to industry (e.g. no standards for ski lift mechanics) • Assist in promoting programs throughout the country and advantages to studying in BC (e.g. great recreational opportunities) • Ensure more frequent IAC meetings • Consider developing additional short, seminar-like opportunities for graduates and newer line-staff, supervisors and managers • Re-emphasize the importance of a successful practicum on their future and on

	<p>the reputation of the institution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to emphasize the basics—individual presentation, behaviour and attitude—so important in our “people centered” industry • Consider ways to increase student involvement with the industry outside the community (e.g. connections with go2, COTA, Industry conference or Canada’s West marketplace • An observation on industry advisory groups for Hospitality Management Programs: because the colleges all articulate our programs, it precludes any individual college and its IAC from changing too much.
<p>13. Ways IAC members describe program’s effectiveness in relation to alignment with HR needs of their industry sector</p>	<p>68.4% mostly effective 21.1% highly effective 15.8% somewhat effective 0% partially effective 0% not effective at all</p>
<p>14. IAC member suggestions for strengthening the role and activities of their IAC</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure the time of the industry advisor’s is used well • Ensure that meetings don’t become ‘token” to fulfill institution requirements • Provide opportunities to “sink teeth into” real issues and provide feedback on progress being made on those issues • Meet students more often for recruitment and development purposes • Encourage more real life case studies are incorporated into program courses • Consider being involved with more than one program – to compare and identify what could be improved • Have institution get IAC members more involved (e.g. sponsor a student to TIC, send regular invitations to speak and to attend student events) • Meet more regularly (quarterly suggested) to truly create momentum and more feedback exchange

5.3 Survey of Tourism/Hospitality Program Coordinators

Topics	Summary of responses
<p>1. Number of members that serve on program IAC (15)</p>	<p>40% 6-9 members 33.3% 10-15 members 20% 1-5 members 6.7% 16 or over</p>
<p>2. Number of years IAC has been operating (14)</p>	<p>42.9% over 10 years 35.7% 6-10 years 14.3% 3-5 years 7.1% 1-2 years</p>

<p>3. Frequency of meetings (12)</p>	<p>50% 1 meeting/year 35% 2 meetings/year 8.3% 3 meetings/year 8.3% 4 meetings/year 8.3% more than 4 meetings/year</p>
<p>4. Does IAC have written guidelines (14)</p>	<p>50% yes 42.9% no 7.15 in development</p>
<p>5. Stated mandate of Industry Advisory Committee (11)</p>	<p>Response highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To provide industry feedback on questions of program development and content ● To provide input and guidance through expertise in the field to the program ● To ensure our programs meet the needs of the changing hospitality industry. The IAC supports us in our goal to provide both local and global employers with employees who have a strong theoretical as well as practical knowledge and a solid commitment to the industry ● To work towards improving tourism training for youth in the community and developing strategies to increase tourism markets with the view of providing paid employment and post-secondary opportunities for youth ● The institution actively seeks the advice of employers and practitioners from the field. The objective of the IAC is to ensure that faculty and administration remain sensitive to the realities of the practical world and the curriculum, personnel and resources of the institution are optimally integrated to prepare students for a career of their choice. This will ensure a high degree of relevancy and currency in instructional programs ● To provide curriculum advice on the program from an industry point of view ● To advise on the purpose, development, revision and effectiveness of programs ● to provide industry input and direction on curriculum and the program in general ● The institution believes that the community it serves can fulfill an important role in program development and continuing program relevance. Program Advisory Committees facilitate relationships with employer groups, community organizations, professional associations and related educational institutions to encourage innovative approaches to learning in both traditional and non-traditional settings and to ensure that timely and responsive formative evaluation keeps all program activity relevant and current.
<p>6. Length of appointment for IAC members (14)</p>	<p>64.3% term varies</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As long as willing to serve • No fixed time-depends on interest • Between 1-2 years • Longer if member is interested • Pending election of officers • Possibility of re-appointment • As long as they want • No fixed term • Varies <p>28.6% 2 years 21.4% 1 year 21.4% 3 years</p>
<p>7. Primary contributions of IAC members (14)</p>	<p>Most important (rank ordered)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Curriculum design/program content 2. Information on industry trends & current employer HR needs 3. Guest speakers 4. Detailed review of course outlines 5. Hosts for field excursions 6. Hosts for student work experiences (<i>last 3 tied</i>) <p>Least important</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assistance with supplies/equipment/facilities etc. 2. Mentors for individual students
<p>8. Some of the most innovative/effective contributions of IAC</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed a number of field trips for students focusing on an “inside look” of operations (e.g. hotel employment and use of national certification, airport security and planned developments etc.) • Participated in a “meet and greet” reception with graduating students; provided one-on-one career advice for students • Provided impetus for development of partnership between school district and regional heritage site -- now used as a youth tourism training centre • IAC members are always offering support, advice and constructive feedback for us in the trenches – where it matters • IAC initiated a program to work with a local institutional food services union to bring staff through three-level program theory while processing prior learning assessment in the field • Our hotel staff evaluate each student’s performance and prepare reference letters • Recommendations for program improvements • Meeting students to learn first hand how the program was going (without faculty present) • Reviewing curriculum • The direct IAC contact with students and tours that they arrange
<p>9. Suggestions for strengthening the IAC</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce an annual newsletter about student accomplishments and highlights of year • Meet more regularly so we can discuss day-to-day issues. This will allow them to really feel like they are part of the college • Provide IAC with opportunities to meet with

	<p>students once a semester</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider operating the IAC in conjunction with an already operating group or association (My IAC consists of the elected Directors of our local tourism association. This gives me access, direct and indirect, to more than 200 local Tourism businesses that are members) • Consider developing an electronic forum to facilitate 'formal' communication with the IAC itself. • Continue to build relationships with more restaurants, hotels & resorts • Focus their efforts with specific tasks – avoid updates and talking to them. Bring them in for two hours every two months and focus their efforts on giving specific information on a specific topic (e.g. one course outline) • Involve students in some of the meetings • Consider having go2 formulate one province-wide IAC for similar programs
<p>10. Other comments/ideas relating to IACs that coordinators feel may be useful to go2 and the BC</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an opportunity for industry members from a number of IACs to meet together (aligned with annual articulation committee meetings). This would allow for a more breadth and depth to the discussions • There is an opportunity for go2 to play a greater role to ensure IACs are up-to-date on what is happening in the industry and are able to contribute from the perspective of the industry as a whole • Consider having a go2 representative on each advisory committee • Use the IAC resource to maximize the excellent networking opportunities for students and for providing valuable input into local HR requirements • The rank ordering in question 8 is redundant because everything I need and request comes to the fore! This program would not have survived without their consistent support. Their time, energy and constant availability to me is priceless. • IACs should be mandatory for every program in the province • The institution seems to think we need an IAC to meet regularly – but in truth we just keep connected by phoning and e-mailing them • A more direct connection to provide feedback to the IAC • Expecting 'industry' to provide loads of feedback and have regular involvement in all aspects of the program is unrealistic, as are certain roles such as marketing the program. There is a concern about burning them out. On the other side, they need to be used effectively, such as providing feedback on courses. While our students are getting jobs and getting much from the program, the advisory committee does not necessarily feel that they were the cause of that. They are an important part, and one piece

	<p>of, a successful program. In addition to our advisory committee, we have a very large coop network that evaluates our students. Through the evaluation, we get feedback on the value of our program. Although not the advisory committee per se, they do have a daily opportunity to evaluate our 'product', a trained student, and this is also a very valuable means to assess the program. Ultimately, evaluating the students is the better route to assess the program, as opposed to simply reviewing curriculum.</p> <p>On "informal" IACs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We re able to keep our program current through an "informal" IAC – faculty members are all industry association members. We develop a relationship with key people and invite them for lunch etc., have them as guest speakers, meet with them about work terms and ask them to review curriculum. • In our particular case, because we place our students in coop placements primarily in Whistler and the greater Banff area we have felt it unreasonable to ask people from those properties to travel to our community for meetings. Consequently we hold discussions with our coop employers when they are on campus recruiting, faculty visit coop properties in addition to a coordinator who does our coop monitoring visits. We have also sought feedback and guidance from particular senior industry individuals as well we recently held a program review with about thirty program alumni. We thus like to think we are close to the industry and have received some very useful feedback and guidance from them; we have done it without our own formal IAC.
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6. Observations and Recommendation

Observations

The survey results present an interesting and useful snapshot of BC tourism/hospitality program industry advisory committees. The relatively low sample size for IAC members is counter-balanced by the good response from coordinators and the many anecdotal comments received while undertaking this survey.

A majority of institutions with IACs find that these groups provide an important contribution in helping the program maintain its currency with the changing face of industry. Some institutions have an exceptionally strong and effective working relationship with their IACs. However, a few programs have commented on how challenging it can be to keep an IAC active and focused especially given the full schedules of the leaders attracted to these voluntary positions.

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Some of the respondents have reported that they have adopted the “informal IAC” route – not a committee that meets regularly, but a network of industry professionals that the school regularly engages with in a variety of ways. These individuals reported that this approach can be effective, but needs the same or more attention and energy as does a “formal” committee.

The overall results in the above summary show no areas of real surprise or major concern. The original task force recommendation was aimed at getting a sense of how well the advisory committees thought-programs were meeting the needs of industry. For the institutions that responded, there was a strong level of satisfaction in this regard. Further research would be necessary to see if this was the case for other non-responding programs.

Both coordinators and industry advisory committee members themselves have clearly identified what they think their most effective roles are – and a number of areas for further discussion and program strengthening have been identified.

Recommendation:

That this IAC “snapshot” and the survey findings in this report, be used as background information for a one-day forum for program coordinators and IAC members alike. This could be co-sponsored by go2 and the Tourism Educators Consortium, and perhaps held in conjunction with the annual tourism educators’ conference. Some possible discussion items for such a forum:

- What issues/ideas are raised in this survey that would be productive for go2 and the tourism education community to discuss further?
- What are “best ideas” that can be replicated elsewhere?
- How can IACs increase their connections with students?
- Is there a need for the establishment of provincial IACs to provide input into individual program areas and core curricula (e.g. hospitality diploma, adventure tourism certificate, tourism degree)?
- Would a handbook –or other resource--for running strong IACs be useful?
- How can ideas and activities be shared between different IACs?
- What can be learned from the institutions that have chosen to use an “informal” approach to obtaining industry input? What are the pros and cons of this approach?
- What are other IAC related topics that would be helpful to revisit on a regular basis?