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## **SPECTRA MAKES ECONOMIC GAINS FOR CONVENTION CENTERS**

Convention and visitors bureaus like to tout how much money, typically in millions and billions, meetings and conventions bring to their cities each year. Calculating economic impact is a way to gain the support of mayors, council members, business owners and citizens.

The power of those economic impact stats is not lost on industry experts like Dave Anderson, regional vice president of Spectra Venue Management and general manager at the Palm Beach County Convention Center in Florida. He and convention center managers in six other cities are working on a project that they hope will create an industry standard for calculating the economic impact their convention centers have.

The collaboration is called the City Pairs Task Force and includes representatives from convention centers and CVBs in Chicago; Denver; Louisville, Kentucky; Overland Park, Kansas; Los Angeles; West Palm Beach, Florida; and Seattle. The cities are partnering with two convention industry organizations — the International Association of Venue Managers and Destinations International, formerly Destinations Management Association International — to create an economic impact calculator specifically for convention centers.

According to Anderson, the City Pairs Task Force hopes to modify a calculator that Destinations International offers its members. “We have paired up with them to refine the calculator and add a piece for convention centers,” he said. “Our goal is to bring something to the table so all the venues can produce their own number. We are trying to produce realistic numbers. Then, if someone asks how you came up with the number, it is not just a pie in the sky.”

Having these numbers in hand is important as convention center managers request funding for renovations, expansions and improvements from the organizations that own the facilities, typically city or county governments. Convention center managers like Anderson realize that to stay competitive, their facilities must be updated and upgraded.

West Palm Beach is a good example. County leaders have approved upgraded LED lighting, Wi-Fi and new carpeting for the convention center, which must not only stay abreast of its competition but also look as fresh as the brand-new Hilton hotel attached to it. “My facility just turned 15, so I have to make sure it looks as good as it did the day it opened,” Anderson said.

Anderson expects the collaborations that have resulted between convention center and CVB staffs through the City Pairs project will have other benefits. Closer working relationships mean that convention center clients will have better access to the CVB and will spread to the other government agencies with whom they sometimes work, like sports commissions, police departments and cultural councils.

Such ties make planning “really fluid,” said Anderson. “There are no roadblocks. Communication is streamlined, and it is much easier to get things done for planners and their groups because we are working as a team.”