



**GACVB**  
**GOLD CERTIFIED**  
Benchmark of Excellence

GEORGIA CVB DESTINATION MARKETING ORGANIZATION

# **Benchmark of Excellence** **CERTIFICATION**

## **LEVEL III – GOLD STANDARD**

**A roadmap for creating and maintaining a recognized standard  
of excellence for destination marketing organizations.**



**LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE**  
COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

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## Benchmark of Excellence Certification History

Destination marketing organizations in the state of Georgia are diverse and have unique operations, programs, and structures. However, the GACVB believes there is a distinct set of measures of quality and professionalism achievable by Georgia DMOs of all sizes, and is pleased to offer the GACVB Destination Marketing Organization Benchmark of Excellence Certification (BEC) program.

The BEC program presents the opportunity for organizations to measure their practices and achievements against a defined set of competencies which serve to increase the overall professionalism and effectiveness of the organization.

In 2008, the GACVB launched its BEC Program for Georgia Destination Marketing Organizations. The program was designed to provide a roadmap for continually creating and maintaining a standard of excellence in all areas of operation. Meeting the required standards earns the bureau/DMO “Benchmark of Excellence Certification.”

The BEC process is exclusively offered to GACVB members. Benchmark of Excellence Certification is valid for a term of three years, terminating on the anniversary of the most recent BEC. Benchmark Excellence is renewable.

BEC is administered through the Cunningham Center for Leadership Development at Columbus State University, a unit of the University System of Georgia.

## Mission

The mission of the Georgia Convention and Visitors Bureau Destination Marketing Organization BEC program is to define a set of standard organizational competencies against which the organization can measure its achievements with the goal of reaching and maintaining these standards. Presence of these competencies serves to increase the overall professionalism and effectiveness of the organization and its staff, thus positively impacting the CVB/DMO staff member, the organization, and stakeholders served.

## Benefits

- Enhances leadership development for the entire organization
- Provides benchmarks for measuring CVB/DMO operations
- Provides direction for professional development plans, both organizational and individual

- Develops pride in the organization
- Brings prestige, respect, credibility, and recognition of the CVB's/DMO's role in the community
- Recognizes the CVB/DMO as exhibiting industry best practices

## Submission Process

- The BEC is broken down in to 3 Levels of application:
  - Level I – **The Bronze Standard**: Bronze certification indicates the applying CVB/DMO has met the minimum requirements of the BEC.
  - Level II – **The Silver Standard**: Silver certification indicates the applying CVB/DMO has met advanced requirements of the BEC.
  - Level III – **The Gold Standard**: Gold certification indicates the applying CVB/DMO has met the highest level of requirements of the BEC.
- You may apply for BEC at any level or you may begin with Level I and work your way up.
- **Review the three levels of the application** found under GACVB Benchmark of Excellence Program Information in the Forums section of the GACVB Member Network Ning site ([www.georgiacvb.ning.com](http://www.georgiacvb.ning.com)). Make a self determination as to which level to proceed at with the BEC process.
- **The Level III Gold Standard ONLY application is included in this downloadable packet.**
- **Submit a Letter of Intent to participate in the BEC process.** This allows the applicant to be updated about the BEC process. An electronic copy sent to [certification@gacvb.com](mailto:certification@gacvb.com) is acceptable with an electronic signature. Otherwise, a hard copy may be mailed to:

Shana Young, Program Coordinator  
GACVB Benchmark of Excellence Certification Program  
c/o The Leadership Institute at Columbus State University  
3100 Gentian Blvd., Columbus, GA 31907

- **Complete/submit** the application package in electronic format to [certification@gacvb.com](mailto:certification@gacvb.com) or save to disk and mail to above address.
- **Un-scheduled site visit.** Site visits are scheduled after package approvals and are unannounced.

## Fee and Deadlines

- \$ 600, payment due as follows:
  - \$200 submitted with Letter of Intent. The balance of the \$600 is due upon final package submission.

### NOTE:

- *If the applying CVB/DMO has already been awarded Level II Silver Standard status a one-time payment of \$100 is the only amount due to proceed with Level III application. The \$100 is due with the Letter of Intent for this level.*
- *If the applying CVB/DMO has already been awarded Level I Bronze Standard status **AND IS SKIPPING THE LEVEL II SILVER STANDARD CERTIFICATION** a one-time payment of \$200 is the only amount due to proceed with Level II application. The \$200 is due with the Letter of Intent for this level.*
- Only four packages will be reviewed per quarter. Review is on a first come, first serve basis.
- The program fees are payable by check or credit card. To pay by check, make payable to CCLD and mail payment to the address listed above. To pay by credit card, email [certification@gacvb.com](mailto:certification@gacvb.com) and a payment link will be sent to you.

Completed applications are accepted electronically at [certification@gacvb.com](mailto:certification@gacvb.com). The first come, first serve status will be established by the date and time stamp of the submitted package's email. If the date falls on a weekend, the deadline is adjusted to the following Monday. Only four packages will be accepted per review date.

All questions regarding the application and the application process should be directed to [certification@gacvb.com](mailto:certification@gacvb.com).

## Review Process

Once full payment and an electronic copy of the completed package have been received, the package is eligible for review by the Benchmark of Excellence Certification Review Board at a quarterly review session.

After the package is reviewed, a confidential report will be provided to the bureau/DMO executive within 60 days indicating an approved or disapproved status. Approved status will be pending a site visit. If the package is not reviewed, it will be held for review at the next review session, based on time and date stamp of received application packages which were not reviewed.

The Review Board will review a limit of four packages per review session. Packages are accepted on a first come, first serve basis, based on time and date stamp of electronic receipt of the package.

In the event of a disapproved status, the Review Board will provide recommendations for attaining the approved status, and the package may be resubmitted without additional charge for a second review if the resubmitted package is received within six months of the original submission. If the package is resubmitted after the six month deadline, an additional \$250 review fee will apply. Resubmittals are guaranteed to be reviewed at the next scheduled review session after receipt of the package. The package may be submitted for a second review only once without additional cost to the bureau/DMO.

Three or more submittals of the same package each requires a \$250 review fee if submitted within one year of the original submission. Re-submittals not made within the one year time limit of the original submission are subject to original submission fees, and must repeat the initial submission process.

In the event of a disapproved status due to findings of the site visit, a second site visit will necessitate an additional fee of \$100 to the bureau/DMO.

## Benchmark of Excellence Certification Review Board

The Benchmark of Excellence Certification Review Board is comprised of the following industry professionals and subject matter experts:

- Current President, GACVB
- BEC Committee Chairman, GACVB
- Executive Director, GACVB
- Representative, Southeast Tourism Society
- Representative, Tourism Division, GDEcD
- Representative, Leadership Institute at Columbus State University

- Subject Matter Experts as needed, at the discretion of the Board, to include attorneys, CPA's HR specialists, and other business professionals

#### Responsibilities:

Review submitted materials, provide recommendations, conduct site visits, and determine certification approval status

Benchmark of Excellence Certification Review Board members are bound to the terms of a GACVB Review Board Confidentiality Agreement.

## Certification Awards

Approval of the BEC application package and an approved site visit yields the bureau/DMO the status of *Benchmark of Excellence Certification* for a term of three years.

## Post Benchmark of Excellence Materials

Upon notice of approved certification, the DMO/bureau receives:

- Recommendations for improvement
- CCLD/GACVB Destination Marketing Organization Benchmark of Excellence Certification Certificate, **Level III Gold Standard**, appropriate for display
- A date-stamped camera- ready logo for incorporation in bureau/DMO collateral and communications
- Statewide press release from the GACBV

## Maintaining Benchmark of Excellence Certification Status

Benchmark of Excellence (BEC) Certification status is effective for a term of three years, terminating on the anniversary date of the most recent. To maintain/renew BEC status, a bureau/DMO must repeat the certification process at the current certification rate.

## Contact Information

Email: [certification@gacvb.com](mailto:certification@gacvb.com)

Phone: 706.569.2415

Mail: Shana Young, Program Coordinator  
GACVB Benchmark of Excellence Certification Program  
c/o The Leadership Institute at Columbus State University  
3100 Gentian Blvd., Columbus, GA 31907

## Benchmark of Excellence Criteria

### Areas of Focus for **LEVEL III – Gold Standard** Certification

There are eight sections of the Level III Gold GACVB Benchmark of Excellence Certification application:

1. Governance
2. Finance
3. Human Resources and Staff Development
4. Technology
5. Marketing and Communications
6. Stakeholder Services and Customer Focus
7. Facilities
8. Benchmarking

In addition, a final site visit by a Benchmark of Excellence Certification Review Board member will be conducted and must be passed in order to Benchmark of Excellence Certification status.

## Formatting Your Package

Your application should follow the format provided, addressing each item in the order in which it is listed. Clearly the application does not provide room for answers, and attachments will be necessary,



so use your best judgment in designing your completed package. However, please embed responses whenever possible to avoid excessive references to an attachment.

Include the original question and its corresponding section and number, such as 1-3, or 1-5, g, with each answer or attachment.

More than likely, your package will be too large to send electronically. Best practices dictate for the document to be converted to PDF format and saved to a CD for mailing. Another option is to email the PDF document by using a third party service such as *www.yousendit.com*.

The Certification program manager will distribute the package to Review Committee members.

## Benchmark of Excellence Certification Application for **LEVEL III – Gold Standard Certification**

### 1. Governance

Standard:

BEC approved DMOs have a clearly stated mission and purpose, the organizational structure is defined, and the board of directors and staff roles and responsibilities are understood.

Minimum qualifications:

- Articles of Incorporation or similar legal documents
- Mission and Vision statements
- Strategic Plan
- Bylaws
- Organizational Chart
- Functional Board of Directors
- Regularly held Board meetings
- Code of Ethics and/or Conflict of Interest Policies
- Local Enabling Legislation
- Statewide Enabling Legislation
- Contract City Government or County Government
- Georgia House & Senate Representation

- 1-1. What is/are the DMO's current mission and/or vision statement(s)?
- 1-2. How were these statements created?
- 1-3. When were they last reviewed by the DMO Board or other governing body?
- 1-4. Attach a copy of the written Strategic Plan that is less than two years old. How was the Strategic Plan created?
- 1-5. Attach a copy of the current articles of incorporation or charter.
  - a. Do the bylaws include board term limits and attendance policies?
  - b. Do the bylaws outline quorums required for board, executive committee and committee meetings?
  - c. Do the bylaws outline officer duties?
  - d. Do the bylaws outline procedures for amendments?
  - e. Has each board member received a copy of the bylaws?
  - f. Attach a copy of the organizational chart, indicating staff members assigned to each component of the organizational structure.
- 1-6. Board Members
  - a. How many officers and directors?
  - b. Are board members heedful of formal rules of order during meetings? Provide 2 examples.
  - c. What are Board member term limits?
  - d. Provide outlines and dates of last two Board member orientations held.
  - e. Provide a copy of the Board member manual?
  - f. Are there detailed job descriptions (other than the bylaws) outlining responsibilities and authority of officers and directors? If so, please provide.
  - g. Attach the minutes from the last three board meetings.
  - h. How are board members selected or recruited?
  - i. What is the process for removing ineffective board members?

- j. Provide a copy Conflict of Interest Policies and Code of Ethics for board and staff. When and how are these distributed and how is receipt/agreement acknowledged?

1-7. How Your Organization is Formed

- a. Does your organization have a 501(c)6 designation from the IRS?
- b. Is your organization part of the County Government, Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Development Authority, City Government, or Joint Development Authority?
- c. Please attach a copy of the contract between your CVB and your local government.
- d. Please attach a copy of your local and state enabling legislation.

1-8. Representation

- a. Who are your elected officials in the Georgia House & Senate? Please provide names(s) and district number.

## 2. Finance

Standard:

BEC approved DMOs conform to generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP), have created and adheres to financial policies, operate on a budget approved by the board of directors, and adhere to regular audits of DMO financial records.

Minimum qualifications:

- Financial policies and procedures in place
  - Has an annual operational budget in place, approved by Board of Directors
  - Accounting and reporting systems are maintained electronically (technology?)
  - Maintains current financial statements
  - Maintains sufficient liability and other required insurances
  - Conducts regular audits of financial records (how often should this take place, and by whom?)
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- 2-1. What system of accounting is used? Please attach your DMO's chart of accounts.
- 2-2. Please provide a copy of the current annual operating budget.
- 2-3. Please provide a copy of the financial policies and procedures manual.
- 2-4. Are budgets and financial statements approved by the Board? How often? Provide the most recent approved budget and financial statement.
- 2-5. What spending limits are in place and how are they enforced?
- 2-6. When is Board approval required for check/payment requests outside of budgeted items?
- 2-7. When were financial statements last reviewed or audited by an outside party? Please provide the official post audit letter of opinion received from the reviewer.
- 2-8. What insurance policies are in place for the CVB? Please summarize all policies and amounts of coverage.
- 2-9. What are payroll procedures?

## 3. Human Resources and Staff Development

Standard:

BEC approved DMOs meet all federal and state regulations governing employers and acts as a catalyst in the professional development of its staff.

Minimum qualifications:

- Employee orientation program in place
- Employee handbook and personnel policies current and in place
- Current job descriptions for all employees
- Employee performance review procedures in place
- Professional development plan for staff members in place

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- 3-1. Does the CVB have employees/staff positions? How many?
  - 3-2. Please provide written job descriptions for each staff position.
  - 3-3. Are background checks performed on applicants? Which background checks?
  - 3-4. Are applicants required to have a drug test before being hired?
  - 3-5. Please attach a copy of personnel policies procedure manual (employee handbook)?
  - 3-6. Please describe employee benefits provided.
  - 3-7. Is there a new employee orientation program? Please provide a copy of orientation materials.
  - 3-8. How often is employee performance reviewed?
  - 3-9. Is the DMO's executive director's performance reviewed? If so, by whom? Please describe the process and provide any forms used.
  - 3-10. Describe your employee performance and review process. Provide a copy of employee performance review materials.
  - 3-11. Provide a description of your typical hiring process.
  - 3-12. Provide a description of your typical firing process.
  - 3-13. What percentage of the budget is allocated to professional development and staff training?

- 3-14. What determination factors are implemented in the selection of professional development opportunities?
- 3-15. List any professional designations for current staff members.
- 3-16. Using the form or format provided, list the number of hours and type of training that each staff member has undergone in the past year:

Staff and Title	Conference or Seminar	Courser of type of development	Location	Hours
<b>Total number of hours</b>				

## 4. Technology

Standard:

BEC approved DMOs have the technological ability to maintain information in a current and secure manner, and use technology to its fullest extent to conduct DMO business in an efficient and effective manner.

Minimum qualifications:

- Telephone, computer, fax. Email, and mailing systems
- Functional and current suite of software applications
- Database management system
- Network security systems and plans in place (backups)
- Internet and email policy for employees
- Has and regularly updates a website (registers web site with search engines?)

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- 4-1. Does the DMO utilize a voice mail system? If not, please explain.
  - 4-2. Does each DMO staff member have a computer? If not, please explain.
  - 4-3. Please attach a copy of your Internet/E-mail usage policy.
  - 4-4. What software programs does the DMO utilize? When was the last software update?
  - 4-5. What is in place in the form of anti-virus measures?
  - 4-6. Does the DMO maintain any data bases? If so, describe the data base(s) and how it/they is/are housed and maintained.
  - 4-7. Does the DMO offer an opt-out option for mass emails? Please describe how it works.
  - 4-8. What is your data back-up system? How often are files backed up?
  - 4-9. Do you incorporate off-site data records storage? If so, please describe the arrangement.
  - 4-10. How is your website managed and maintained? When was it last updated?
  - 4-11. Do you have a technology plan for remaining current with hardware and software? If so, please attach.

4-12. Please describe how the DMO uses technology to bolster its mission.

## 5. Marketing and Communications

Standard:

BEC approved DMOs have a comprehensive marketing plan and execute marketing strategies which tie in with the DMO's annual budget and goals.

Minimum qualifications:

- A comprehensive and executable marketing plan
- Uses diverse forms of media to reach target markets
- Effectively uses website as a marketing tool
- Complies with federal CAN-SPAM requirements (opt out)
- Adheres to guidelines or style guides for DMO publications
- Provides updated collateral materials for target markets

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5-1. Please attach a copy of the DMO's Marketing Plan.

5-2. When was the Marketing Plan last updated?

5-3. Please describe the specific products and services offered.

5-4. How many of each of the following has your DMO conducted or attended in the last three months? If none, please explain.

- a. Tradeshows attended/exhibited
- b. Familiarization tours
- c. Number of sales calls
- d. Number of client site inspections
- e. Client events
- f. Sponsorships

5-5. What trackable performance measures are in place? Provide the most recent reports for each.

5-6. List the key market segments served, and what the DMO does to directly benefit each segment.



- 5-7. Provide copies of all current collateral materials used to meet the needs of stakeholders.
- 5-8. What is being done to drive visitors to your website? If available, provide statistics on website hits for the last six months.
- 5-9. Does the CVB have a current media list for reaching stakeholders? Please provide a copy of the media list.

## 6. Stakeholder Services and Customers

### Standard:

BEC approved DMOs maintain measures of stakeholder impact and designs its sales focus to meet the needs of its markets.

Minimum qualifications:

- Procedures for responding to inquiries
- Defined set of services offered for all markets served
- Has a customer feedback and research mechanisms in place
- Maintains stakeholder relationships with a variety of community entities

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- 6-1. Describe the typical inquiry process, and mechanisms in place to provide for a standardized level of customer service.
  - 6-2. Describe your customer feedback mechanisms, and provide customer comments received in the past six months as a result of these feedback mechanisms.
  - 6-3. If you have conducted surveys of any type in the past 12 months, other than customer feedback surveys referenced in the previous question, please list and describe method, purpose, and findings for each.
  - 6-4. List market research activities, to include surveys, dispatched or conducted in the past 12 months.
  - 6-5. List collaborative partners who serve as advocates and stakeholders, describe the relationship for each with your DMO, and the subsequent effect of each relationship.

## 7. Facilities

Standard:

BEC approved DMOs maintain premises, furniture, equipment, and property in a respectable manner which sustains and preserves value, both financially and in the eyes of its stakeholders.

Minimum qualifications:

- Projects an image appropriate for the business community
- Is accessible to the public
- Adheres to workplace safety, including OSHA regulations
- Has a crisis plan in place and trains and educates staff about the crisis plan
- Adheres to “Green” policies
- Maintains an off-site location for back-up of pertinent records

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- 7-1. Please describe a description of the DMO’s facility and occupancy arrangement. (Leased, owned, etc.)
- 7-2. Provide a copy of the DMO’s Crisis Plan and provide an overview of the specific cases for which a plan is in place. Does the Crisis Plan specifically distinguish between procedures for continuity of operations, safety of employees, and preservation of stakeholder interests? Provide specific examples.
- 7-3. How and when have employees received training on the Crisis plan?
- 7-4. What safety precautions are in place? For example, smoke alarms, outside lighting, security system, etc.
- 7-5. What does the DMO/CVB do on a regular basis to be environmentally responsible?
- 7-6. What is the method of communication used to alert employees of an emergency?

## 8. Benchmarking

Standard:

BEC approved DMOs monitor the achievement of long and short-term goals. Measurement is both quantitative and qualitative. Knowledge is gained and implemented through action, planning, and experience.

Minimum qualifications:

- There are no minimum qualifications. This section is provided for the Review Board’s better understanding of the DMO and its goals.

8-1. Goal setting and realization:

List the DMO’s top five short term goals	Has the DMO accomplished this goal? Yes or No	If so, what was done to accomplish this goal? If not, what is the DMO doing to meet this goal?	What quantitative measures does the DMO use to track this goal?

8-2. If there is any supporting documentation the DMO wishes to include which may not have been specifically requested prior to this point, use this section and item number to include such documents. In addition to attaching the documentation, please preface each with a brief description of material being attached.

## Conclusion and Signature Page

Congratulations! You have completed the BEC Application package.

Please read, sign, and attach this final page to your completed application. It is required for review of your package. This page may be submitted electronically with electronic signatures at the time of electronic package submission or a hard copy with original signatures may be mailed to:

Shana Young, Program Coordinator  
GACVB Benchmark of Excellence Certification Program  
c/o The Leadership Institute at Columbus State University  
3100 Gentian Blvd.  
Columbus, GA 31907

We certify, as an elected office and executive employee of the

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*(Bureau/DMO Name)*

that we have fully researched the questions in the application and that all answers are provided are accurate and complete.

Signatures:

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Chief Paid Executive

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Chief Elected Officer

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Date