

Ken Burke, CPA

CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT AND COMPTROLLER
PINELLAS COUNTY, FLORIDA


Clerk of the County Court
Recorder of Deeds
Clerk and Accountant of the Board of County Commissioners
Custodian of County Funds
County Auditor

Division of Inspector General

510 Bay Avenue
Clearwater, FL 33756
Telephone: (727) 464-8371
Fax: (727) 464-8386
Fraud Hotline: (727) 45FRAUD (453-7283)
Clerk's website: www.mypinellasclerk.org

REPORT NO. 2013-29

TO: D.T. Minich, Executive Director
Convention and Visitors Bureau

FROM: Hector Collazo, Jr., Director 
Division of Inspector General

DIST: Ken Burke, CPA, Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller
Robert LaSala, County Administrator
Mark S. Woodard, Assistant County Administrator

SUBJECT: Investigative Review Of The Convention And Visitors Bureau's
Compliance With Area Chambers Of Commerce Funding Agreements

DATE: September 12, 2013

The Division of Inspector General's Public Integrity Unit (PIU) received allegations of Fraud, Waste, and Abuse related to the Convention and Visitors Bureau's (CVB) compliance with the area Chambers of Commerce Funding Agreements.

The Complainant alleged that the CVB (respondent) was not adhering to the terms of their contracts for funding with the local Chambers of Commerce (Chambers), and that the CVB was funding the full amounts to the various Chambers even though the Chambers did not always submit all of the required reports to the CVB. The Complainant also alleged that the contracts stated that failure to file the required reports would disqualify the Chamber from receiving any future funding from the county.

The Complainant did not provide documentation to assist with the investigation.

To determine whether the allegations were substantiated, we reviewed policies, procedures, and any other records deemed appropriate. We also conducted interviews of staff and other parties, as needed. Our investigation was performed according to the *Principles and Standards for Offices of Inspector General and The Florida Inspectors*



General Standards Manual from The Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation.

The Division of Inspector General's investigative review of the allegations has determined that the allegations noted above were *unfounded*.

The Inspector General Division met with CVB management to discuss the allegations regarding the CVB's compliance with their contract terms with the Chambers. The contracts specified that the Chambers would file the two following reports each month with the CVB:

1. The first report would include tourism visitation numbers comprised of visitor information, phone calls, faxes, mail inquiries, emails, unique visits to the Chamber's website, walk-in visitors utilizing Chamber services, and tourism literature pieces distributed.
2. The second report would include the outcome of the prior month's events and planned future events.

CVB management responded that the original Chamber contracts stated, "The Chamber shall file two monthly reports as required by The Visit St. Petersburg Clearwater." However, the CVB Director stated that they only *required* the tourism visitation numbers report from the Chambers. The CVB did not utilize the second report. After the Complainant raised this issue to CVB, the CVB amended the contracts to state, "The Chamber shall file a monthly report that at a minimum includes tourism visitation numbers comprised of visitor information, phone calls, faxes, mail inquires, and emails, 'unique' visits to the Chamber website, walk-in visitors utilizing Chamber services, and tourism literature pieces distributed." Also, item #2 of the amended contracts waived the reporting requirement of the second report for those Chambers that did not file them in 2012.

We want to thank the Management and staff of CVB for their assistance and cooperation during this investigation.