

VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRES HANDBOOK

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO VIC OPERATIONS

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1. ABOUT VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRES

A Visitor Information Centre (VIC) is a physical location that provides tourist information to visitors who tour in the vicinity of the place or area and they are usually located within the municipal area. VICs play an important role within the tourism industry, as they serve as vital first points of contact and provide value-adding services to visitors.

Visitor Information Centres can either be privately owned or Government owned. Privately owned VICs are directly owned and run by the local community through an organisation separate from the official (local) governmental institutions of the area, but with the full knowledge and sometimes even funding from relevant (local) government institutions. The government owned VICs are owned by a municipality and get funding for daily operations from the municipality.

Tourists perceive Visitor Information Centres (VICs) as important in the provision of tourist services at the destination. The main information they need relates to attractions, timing and travel information. Modern tourists prefer a combination of traditional sources of information in a form of written information (brochures), verbal information (face-to-face) as well as electronic information (Internet, Cell Phone Applications etc.). However, there is a growing trend in travellers using the Internet as a source of information and to make reservations for various tourism products e.g. accommodation, car hire etc.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE HANDBOOK

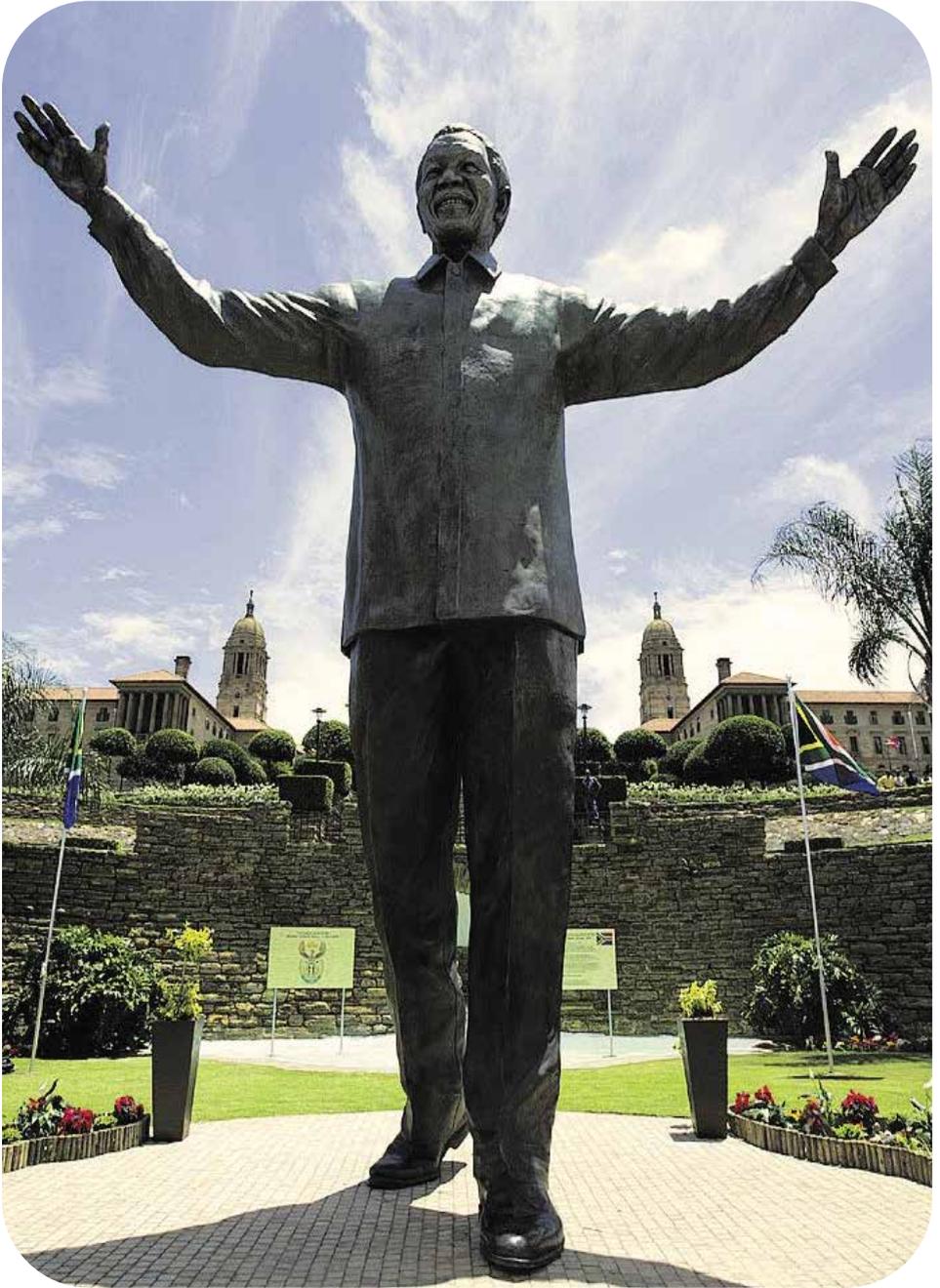
This handbook serves as a guide for VICs' daily operations and supplements the VIC's operational policies and/or procedures. All VICs are expected to comply with a range of Local, District and Provincial government legislations and regulations as well as other standards, rules and regulations laid down by sector bodies and legislation. This handbook covers the key areas of VIC operation that must be taken into account as part of day-to-day operational procedures at a VIC.

The handbook is merely an operational guide which will assist with interacting with visitors as well as improving the overall approach to managing the VIC. It serves as guide and does not seek to replace any existing legislation or organisational policy. At best, it directs VIC officials on how best to run a VIC from an operational point of view and focuses on three aspects mainly, the day-to-day operations, service provision and capacity building. There is a need for VICs to operate in a standardised manner across the country, as this adds value in the growth of the tourism sector and further benefits the economy of the country.

This handbook covers the following key aspects of a typical VIC's operational requirements and procedures:

- Operations – operations have to do with the carrying out of daily duties that are required for a VIC to be fully functional. One of the key sections is the operational checklist that the VIC officials need to use on a daily basis.

- Opening and closing procedures – these procedures are necessary to apply at all VICs as a good practice and to alleviate incidents of unauthorised entry to the VIC after hours. Key to this section is the graphic presentation of routine opening and closing procedure.
- Database Management – the management of a database of tourism products and membership is a backbone of a VIC and should be done professionally.
- Reporting – all VICs are expected to compile reports on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis. In some instances, the reporting could be done on a weekly basis and should cover the capturing and analysis of statistics.
- Service provision and the principles of Batho Pele (People First) – this section summarises the key aspects of what a VIC official should do in order to provide excellent customer service and also presents a graphic illustration of the principles of Batho Pele. This section also outlines some of the best methods on how to go about handling complaints.
- Branding – the section on branding alludes to the need for VICs to promote a unified VIC brand that sells the South Africa tourism sector brand. The National Visitor Information Centres Framework developed by the Department of Tourism provides more insight on the need for unified VIC branding and is available from the department. This VIC Operations Handbook ends by highlighting the need for all VICs to capacitate the VIC officials through identifying the skills gap and implementing the correct training interventions. It also highlights the need for VICs to comply with indemnity requirements in order to prevent legalities arising from services provided by the VIC.



OPERATIONS AND ADMINISTRATION



3. OPERATION & ADMINISTRATION

For the purpose of this handbook, operations refer to day-to-day activities that the VIC officials are required to carry out in order for the VIC to fulfil its mandate of providing tourism services to the visitor. The carrying out of activities entails administrative and other functions that ensure that the VIC functions like any other organisation. Below are some of the generic aspects of a VIC that require attention on daily basis or as regularly as the VIC management finds necessary.

3.1 Maintenance

Customers equate the image and appearance of a VIC with the quality of service and advice they will receive. Workstations and office conditions should be checked on a regular basis, to ensure they are welcoming to the customer and it lives up to the expectation. The checklist provides an example of an operational checklist that may assist the VIC official to note or customise. The purpose of the checklist is to ensure that the VIC is ready before the doors are opened for business. The physical condition of the VIC should be monitored throughout the year, to ensure that it remains neat and tidy all the time. In essence, it is every official's responsibility to ensure that the VIC looks clean, neat and tidy all the time.

- **Entrance:** should be kept swept and tidy on a daily basis.
- **Windows:** should be kept clean, especially the glass of the front door.
- **Carpets:** should be vacuumed regularly and mats shaken on daily basis.

3.2 Brochure Racks

Depending on the size, location and visitor traffic, a VIC requires a dedicated space for brochure display. The brochure racks should be divided into categories of information and/or regions to make it easier for visitors to get the kind of information they require. A VIC is expected to and should have free easy-to-use tourist maps of the local town/area including nearby attractions as a minimum requirement. Regional and national maps may be for sale if deemed necessary. VICs in the same region should also standardise their maps to ensure that the tourist receives the same information no matter from which VIC the map is collected from.



Display of the Brochure Rack

3.3 Display Cabinets

The layout, décor and VIC personnel should be able to create an appealing ambiance for anyone visiting the VIC to feel comfortable enough to interact and enjoy the features of the VIC. This would include ensuring that the display cabinets are kept neat and tidy and fully stocked, should a VIC be selling merchandise; the price tags should be displayed in a manner that is easy for the visitor to read.

3.4 Important Contact Numbers

Information Officers should be able to provide tourist with a list of relevant important contact numbers which they might require during their stay in South Africa. Here is a list of important contact numbers that the traveller may need in the case of an emergency; SAPS; ambulance service, rescue service (aviation), medical rescue

3.5 Assets Register

The VIC needs to know the details and value of each individual item it owns. This information is required for assets control purposes, as well as insurance and scheduling of maintenance and replacement. A summary of each item should be listed on an assets register of the VIC. It is the VIC management's responsibility to have a system in place to update the assets register on a regular basis. Each time equipment is purchased it is entered on the assets register in e.g. the following categories: Furniture and Furnishings for both office and shop (for VICs with curio shops); Individual items over R300.00 in value (e.g. office equipment) etc.

VERIFICATION OF ASSETS/FURNITURE AND OFFICE EQUIPMENT							
Item Name	Description	Barcode	Qty	Purchase Date	Warranty	Purchase Cost	Projected Replacement Date
Desk	With 3 Drawers	23668	1	23/04/14	1 year	R6 200	5 years
Chair	Black, Reclining	23669	1	23/04/14	1 year	R1 900	5 years

Table 1: Example of an assets register template

Below is a list of aspects to consider for a register per each item:

- Item name;
- Number of items or grouped items;
- Purchase date (ddmmyyyy);
- Description;
- Model ID;
- Serial number;
- Special features;
- Purchase cost - with column total (x);
- Supplier;
- Full contact details;
- Warranty period and expiry date;
- Replacement date (ddmmyyyy);

The register is used to help aspects of budget planning. In particular, the budget needs to provide for the replacement of equipment.

3.6 Key Register

A key register for the VIC is used to record the names and contact details of all personnel with the responsibility of handling the VIC keys. Key registers are necessary for VICs that have more than one official responsible to open and/or close the VIC in order to ensure accountability and control. Keys should also be numerically identified and cross-referenced within the register. The register should be reviewed on a regular basis. In the event of a lost key the VIC manager will be responsible for replacing all locks that are affected by the lost key. The purpose of the key is to prescribe the control, use and possession of keys at the VIC in order to ensure an appropriate level of accessibility, security and protection is afforded to tourism officials, assets, property and facilities.

KEY REGISTER - EXAMPLE						
Tshwane Visitor Information Centre						
Official's Name	Position	Key Number	Access To	Date Issued	Recipient Signature	Authorising Signature
John Smith	Info Officer	MY234	Storage	25/07/2014	Signature	Signature
Jacob Bush	Supervisor	MY234	Front Door	25/07/2014	Signature	Signature

Table 2: Example of Key Register

3.7 Record-keeping



Record-keeping forms part of mandatory administrative functions for any organisation and VICs are also expected to do the same. The VIC should at all times ensure that all transactions taking place at the VIC are recorded and a systematic audit of business transactions takes place on regular basis to ensure compliance with good business management practices. The transaction record-keeping should include all documents that are relevant for the purpose of ascertaining the business's income and expenditure. Records should be kept for a minimum of five years from the date of transaction. There are various kinds of records that are to be kept and for the purpose of the VIC the records that should be kept may include although not limited to the following:

- financial records;
- staff records;
- visitor statistics;
- visitors book.

3.8 Safety Procedures



VICs need to comply with the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) regulations and should have a valid OHS certificate all the times. VICs form part of the workplace and need to comply with the OHS requirements for VIC officials and the public or tourists who visit the facility and therefore they have an obligation to comply with the workplace, health and safety issues. The VIC should develop, implement and maintain occupational health and safety systems, policies, procedures and standards that will minimise work related injuries and illness and provide safe work facilities and equipment; including the resources and training necessary to assist in maintaining a safe work environment.

The measures should cover but not limited to the following aspects:

- how to raise an emergency alarm;
- who the emergency security contact person is;
- location of emergency exit/escape doors and procedures;
- where to assemble in the case of emergency and evacuation;
- emergency evacuation charts should be prominently displayed within the VIC.

3.9 Daily VIC Operations Checklist

Checklists communicate a variety of information from work goals and project objectives to people's ability to organise and communicate information. The daily VIC checklist is not hard and fast rules to live by; they are guidelines to help the VIC maintain consistency when assisting tourists and to ensure that every experience at that particular VIC is a good experience.

One of the underlying reasons for using the checklist is to prevent mistakes. The Operational Checklist that is to be implemented at the start of every day. This Operational checklist will be checked by tourism officers and signed and dated by either the VIC manager or a colleague. Should it be found that the Operational Checklist was not implemented correctly the person that conducted the check as well as the witness that signed that all is in order will be held responsible for any inconvenience caused as a result. Below is an example of a checklist that can be used at a VIC. Please note that this is just a guide and each VIC may be unique and therefore may have more or less or even different items depending on what it has as part of the inventory and/or assets.

OPERATIONAL CHECKLISTS (FRONT PAGE)

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
Brochures							
Display racks are neat and fully stocked							
Member brochures are on display (neat and fully stocked)							
All commissioned operator brochures in stock and on display(where applicable)							
All brochures/promotional materials are current							
Flyers displayed neatly							
Brochures displayed vertically for visual impact and neatness							
Only the officailly authorised material are on display							
Equipment							
All terminals operational prior to the commencement of the shift							
Printers, Fax, Copier etc all working clear of clutter and neatly placed							
Cords & Cables are neat tidy safe and not frayed							

OPERATIONAL CHECKLISTS							
	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
Displays							
Clean and tidy, not faded or tattered							
Only up to date material is displayed							
Displays are in accordance with OHS requirements							
No sharp edges, no cords or wire protruding							
All displays prices/info are clearly visible at eye level							
Work Stations							
Clear and uncluttered - no stuffed toys, fluffy animals on computers							
No unnecessary stickers notes on computers and/or desks							
No company confidential information on public display at anytime							
Where possible desks are to be kept clear of files							
Personal property to be kept safe and not left on desk tops							
Table 3: Example of operational checklist							

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
NAME: DATE: SIGN:						
WITNESS:	WITNESS:	WITNESS:	WITNESS:	WITNESS :	WITNESS:	WITNESS:

Table 4: Example of VIC operational checklist (back page)

OPENING AND CLOSING PROCEDURES



4. OPENING & CLOSING PROCEDURES

Depending on the VIC setup and requirements, certain procedures such as opening and closing the VIC at the beginning and end of business may need to be applied on a daily basis. In essence the procedure is designed to describe 'Who', 'What', 'Where', 'When', and 'Why' by means of establishing corporate accountability in support of the implementation of the procedure. Procedures are important because they are the strategic link between the VICs vision and the day to day operations. Written procedures enable employees to understand their roles and responsibilities within defined limits. This also allows management to guide operations without constant management intervention.



Figure 1: Opening and Closing procedures

DATABASE MANAGEMENT



5. DATABASE MANAGEMENT

Data and information management is the development of policies and systems that protect and deliver the information that the VIC needs in order to operate. In-depth data and information management is crucial to the success of any VIC and should always be a priority. When data is inaccurate, inaccessible, lost, or incomplete, the VIC can suffer from financial losses, missed opportunities, low productivity, and a poor reputation. To assist the VIC with managing its data and information more effectively, as a team list the frustrations and inefficiencies that are experienced. Then, review the risks that you need to protect against. When the changes that need to be made have been identified, assistance can be requested from IT professionals about these issues and find out what you can do to streamline processes and systems within the VIC.

There are various kinds of databases that can be developed for capturing. The kind of database that you create will depend on what information you require and what you will be doing with that captured information.

To keep a proper database, a decision has to be made on the type of data that will be kept. This will ensure that the management of the database does not become complex and that the duplication of data is eliminated. This can include the number of visitors that visit the VIC, the period of high visitor turnout and also the questions that are frequently asked. All these data stored in a proper and reliable database will assist management in decision making. Furthermore, there should be in place a backup and recovery strategy that would be used in case of data loss.

It should be the responsibility of each VIC to ensure that the information contained in the databases are kept relevant. The

information can be updated on quarterly basis by consulting with the appropriate data custodians.



EXAMPLE OF DATABASE CATEGORIES

DATABASE	DESCRIPTION
Accommodation	A database that contains accommodation establishments in the nearby area. Preferably only graded establishments
Tour Operators	A list of registered Tour Operators that could assist with getting cheaper rates for bookings
Tour Guides	A list that contains all registered tourist guides in the province
Attractions and Activities	Local attractions and activities that the tourist will enjoy
Tourism Office / VICs	A list of contact information for all tourism offices in the surrounding area
Transportation	Contact information for local shuttles, tour busses and taxis etc
Events	A database of events taking place on a monthly basis
Emergency	Contact information of hospitals, fire stations, disaster management, doctors etc in the region
Entertainment	A list of family friendly places that can be visited as well as night life establishments that can be enjoyed

Table 5: Example of VIC Database categories

CAPTURING OF STATISTICS



6. CAPTURING OF STATISTICS

Statistics is the study of numerical information, which is called data. Statistics are used as a tool to understand information. Learning to understand statistics helps to react intelligently to statistical claims. Statistics capturing are a mandatory function of a VIC, as it informs decision-making but more than anything, is it keeps the VIC officials make informed decisions about the achievements or lack of thereof. When reporting on statistics the key reporting areas could include where the tourists are coming from; the current province that the VIC is located in; what information did they require from the VIC etc. The reporting frequency may vary from VIC to VIC but monthly, quarterly and annual reports are often a norm across organisations. The visitor statistics component of the report may be made available to the stakeholders on request, as it would assist in decision-making

Statistics are a planning tool that helps to forecast the future. All VICs are required to have a credible visitor statistics capturing system in place and be used consistently. The system should be able to capture the numbers and profiles of all visitors for analysis, reporting and decision-making purposes and the statistics should be analysed on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis and be made available to stakeholders on request. The monthly data will serve as the basis for establishing visitor patterns during tourism seasons. The capturing of visitor statistics at a VIC is mandatory, as it assists in decision-making and can be very helpful in determining tourist trends. The fields of data that will be captured for statistical purposes will be determined

by the managing authority of the VIC. Below is an example of important data that a visitor statistics form should capture

VISITOR STATS CAPTURING TEMPLATE

Month: _____

06H00 - 14H00 Staff Name: _____

14H00 - 22H00 Staff Name: _____

09H00 - 17H00 Staff Name: _____

ENTRY NUMBER	NO. PEOPLE	ACCOMMODATION PROVINCE TOWN	TRANSPORT (PROVINCE/ TOWN)	TOURS (PROVINCE/ TOWN)	BROCHURE (PROVINCE/ TOWN)	ATTRAC- TIONS (PROVINCE/ TOWN)	SEX EVENTS OTHER	OTHER
1								
2								

Table 6: Example of Visitor Statistics Capturing Template

SERVICE PROVISION



7. SERVICE PROVISION



VICs are key contact points for a tourist and as such, play an important role in promoting the local, regional and countrywide tourism products. For the tourist, a VIC is a one-stop resource where he/she expects all related tourism queries to be answered satisfactorily and anything offered over and above what the tourist had been expecting goes a long way in creating a lasting impression about the destination. A VIC also provides a good opportunity to showcase and promote the tourism sector's niche products such as culture and heritage, mega events and other authentically African tourism products that the country has to offer.

In cases where the VIC has an opportunity to generate income, this can present an opportunity for the VIC to sell merchandise from the facility thereby supporting tourism businesses. The VIC is also the face of the tourism sector and should always strive to meet the minimum expected standards of service excellence in order to help in promoting return visits to the destination. It is strongly recommended that all VICs are

manned by not only qualified officials who are driven by passion for service excellence – officials who have an intuitive drive to go an extra mile in service excellence. The VIC should always strive to offer the best service that can be offered within its capability.

The general principle in service excellence has to do with achieving the level of standards accepted as being above the ordinary service that a typical tourist would receive at any VIC. In order to achieve service excellence each VIC should have benchmarks from what the officials consider to be minimum standards of service to what is considered to be average service and what is considered to be above average service and subsequently what is deemed to be outstanding service. There are different kinds of principles that should be put in place in order to achieve service excellence. Below is list of some of the guidelines applicable.

7.1 Uniform Code

It is advisable that each VIC has a uniformed dress code to ensure that, in carrying out their daily duties, all the VIC officials look the part. The dress code includes wearing name badges. Suggestions for the dress code or uniform include branded clothing items of the same colour are worn by all VIC officers.

7.2 Staff/Shift Roster(Operations)

In VICs that operate longer than normal business hours requiring shift work, it is advisable that rosters are prepared on a monthly basis and should be made available to the VIC officials well in advance. This will enable the officials to familiarise themselves with the requirements beforehand. Rosters can be posted in areas where they are easily accessible to the officials.

VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE

Roster: March 2015

Staff Member X				Staff Member Y				Staff Member Z			
2	Mon	14h00-22h00	8	2	Mon	OFF	0	2	Mon	06h00-14h00	8
3	Tues	14h00-22h00	8	3	Tues	OFF	0	3	Tues	06h00-14h00	8
4	Wed	14h00-22h00	8	4	Wed	06h00-14h00	8	4	Wed	OFF	0
5	Thurs	OFF	0	5	Thurs	06h00-14h00	8	5	Thurs	14h00-22h00	8
6	Fri	OFF	0	6	Fri	06h00-14h00	8	6	Fri	14h00-22h00	8
7	Sat	06h00-14h00	8	7	Sat	OFF	0	7	Sat	14h00-22h00	8
8	Sun	06h00-14h00	8	8	Sun	OFF	0	8	Sun	14h00-22h00	8
Weekly Hours			40	Weekly Hours			24	Weekly Hours			48
9	Mon	06h00-14h00	8	9	Mon	14h00-22h00	8	9	Mon	OFF	0
10	Tue	OFF	0	10	Tue	14h00-22h00	8	10	Tue	06h00-14h00	8
11	Wed	06h00-14h00	8	11	Wed	14h00-22h00	8	11	Wed	NDT	8
12	Thu	06h00-14h00	8	12	Thu	OFF	0	12	Thu	14h00-22h00	8
13	Fri	OFF	0	13	Fri	06h00-14h00	8	13	Fri	14h00-22h00	8
14	Sat	OFF	0	14	Sat	09h00-17h00	8	14	Sat	OFF	0
15	Sun	OFF	0	15	Sun	09h00-17h00	8	15	Sun	OFF	0
Weekly Hours			24	Weekly Hours			48	Weekly Hours			32
16	Mon	14h00-22h00	8	16	Mon	OFF	0	16	Mon	06h00-14h00	8
17	Tue	14h00-22h00	8	17	Tue	OFF	0	17	Tue	06h00-14h00	8
18	Wed	14h00-22h00	8	18	Wed	06h00-14h00	8	18	Wed	NDT	8
19	Thu	14h00-22h00	8	19	Thu	06h00-14h00	8	19	Thu	OFF	0
20	Fri	OFF	0	20	Fri	14h00-22h00	8	20	Fri	06h00-14h00	8
21	Sat	14h00-22h00	8	21	Sat	OFF	0	21	Sat	06h00-14h00	8
22	Sun	14h00-22h00	8	22	Sun	OFF	0	22	Sun	06h00-14h00	8
Weekly Hours			48	Weekly Hours			24	Weekly Hours			48
23	Mon	06h00-14h00	8	23	Mon	14h00-22h00	8	23	Mon	OFF	0
24	Tue	06h00-14h00	8	24	Tue	14h00-22h00	8	24	Tue	OFF	0
25	Wed	OFF	0	25	Wed	14h00-22h00	8	25	Wed	06h00-14h00	8
26	Thu	06h00-14h00	8	26	Thu	OFF	0	26	Thu	14h00-22h00	8
27	Fri	06h00-14h00	8	27	Fri	14h00-22h00	8	27	Fri	OFF	0
28	Sat	OFF	0	28	Sat	09h00-17h00	8	28	Sat	OFF	0
29	Sun	OFF	0	29	Sun	09h00-17h00	8	29	Sun	OFF	0
Weekly Hours			32	Weekly Hours			48	Weekly Hours			16
30	Mon	14h00-22h00	8	30	Mon	OFF	0	30	Mon	06h00-14h00	8
31	Tue	14h00-22h00	8	31	Tue	06h00-14h00	8	31	Tue	06h00-14h00	8
Weekly Hours			16	Weekly Hours			8	Weekly Hours			16
Total Number of Hours Worked			160	Total Number of Hours Worked			152	Total Number of Hours Worked			160
Public Holiday											
Weekend											
Split Shift Weekend											
Off											

N.B. You can swap shifts by arrangement with the a respective colleague but should confirm with the supervisor as well.

Table 7: Example of VIC Operational Roster

7.3 Application of the Batho Pele (People First) Principles

Although primarily meant for South Africa's Public Servants, the Principles of Batho Pele are applicable in customer service environments outside the government sector and are therefore relevant because the majority of VICs across South Africa are government-owned. The Batho Pele principles aim to enhance the quality and accessibility of government services by improving efficiency and accountability to the recipients of public goods and services. The eight principles are summarised as follows: regularly consult with customers; set service standards; increase access to services; ensure higher levels of courtesy; provide more and better information about services; increase openness and transparency about services; remedy failures and mistakes and provide the best possible value for money. These are summarised graphically below:



EIGHT BATHO PELE PRINCIPLES TO KICKSTART THE TRANSFORMATION OF SERVICE DELIVERY

The Public Service will put the following "People First" principles into practice without delay. And we will step up implementation to arrive at acceptable service levels and quality as soon as possible.

1 CONSULTATION

You can tell us what you want from us.

You will be asked for your views on existing public services and may also tell us what new basic services you would like. All levels of society will be consulted and your feelings will be conveyed to Ministers, MECs and legislators.

THE PRINCIPLE: You should be consulted about the level and quality of the public services you receive and, wherever possible, should be given a choice about the services that are offered.



2 SERVICE STANDARDS

Isms that our promises are kept.

All national and provincial government departments will be required to publish service standards for existing and new services. Standards may not be lowered! They will be monitored at least once a year and be raised progressively.

THE PRINCIPLE: You should be told what level and quality of public services you will receive so that you are aware of what to expect.

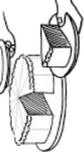


3 ACCESS

One and all should get their fair share.

Departments will have to set targets for extending access to public servants and public services. They should implement special programmes for improved service delivery to physically, socially and culturally disadvantaged persons.

THE PRINCIPLE: You and all citizens should have equal access to the services to which you are entitled.



4 COURTESY

Don't accept insensitive treatment.

All departments must set standards for the treatment of the public and incorporate these into their Codes of Conduct, values and training programmes. Staff performance will be regularly monitored, and discourtesy will not be tolerated.

THE PRINCIPLE: You should be treated with courtesy and consideration.



5 INFORMATION

You're entitled to full particulars.

You will get full, accurate and up-to-date facts about services you are entitled to. Information should be provided at service points and in local media and languages. Contact numbers and names should appear in all departmental communications.

THE PRINCIPLE: You should be given full, accurate information about the public services you are entitled to receive.



6 OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY

Administration must be an open book.

You'll have the right to know. Departmental staff numbers, particulars of senior officials, expenditure and performance against standards will not be secret. Reports to citizens will be widely published and submitted to legislatures.

THE PRINCIPLE: You should be told how national and provincial departments are run, how much they cost, and who is in charge.



7 REDRESS

Your complaints must spark positive action.

Mechanisms for recording any public dissatisfaction will be established and all staff will be trained to handle your complaints fast and efficiently. You will receive regular feedback on the outcomes.

THE PRINCIPLE: If the promised standard of service is not delivered, you should be offered an apology, a full explanation and a speedy and effective remedy. When complaints are made, you should receive a sympathetic, positive response.



8 VALUE FOR MONEY

Your money should be employed wisely.

You pay income, VAT and other taxes to finance the administration of the country. You have the right to insist that your money should be used properly. Departments owe you proof that efficiency savings and improved service delivery are on the agenda.

THE PRINCIPLE: Public services should be provided economically and efficiently in order to give you the best possible value for money.



Designed and issued by the Department of Public Service and Administration.

7.4 Service Delivery

Comments, feedback and complaints from customers are important for making important adjustments to the manner in which a business is conducted and that can result in improved service delivery. It is recommended that VICs review the comments which they receive to determine emerging trends.

7.5 Events Calendar

An events calendar should be created and kept up to date. The events calendar should be displayed within the VIC for perusal of the tourists. The events should also be uploaded on the National Department of Tourism's Knowledge portal (TKP) at <http://tkp.tourism.gov.za> to assist with promoting the events.

7.6 Weather Focus

It is recommended that up-to-date daily and weekly weather forecasts be made available at the information desk on daily basis however tourists should also be encouraged to visit south weather based websites such as www.weathersa.co.za

7.7 Currency updates for major currencies e.g. €; £; US\$; ¥

On a daily basis the conversion rates for the above mentioned currencies should be checked as they are the most requested currencies, and be updated to help visitors who may need the information. To aid with consistency and providing standardised services to tourist's tourism officers should source such information e.g. from the reserve bank on www.resbank.co.za or other sources. It is advisable to inform tourists that the VIC is merely providing the exchange rate as it is provided in the above mentioned web address and is not providing the services of that of a bank.

7.8 Handling of Complaints

a. Tourists

Complaint handling should be undertaken by the Manager. How the VIC manager handles these situations can make or break the establishment. When the inevitable complaints come, it's natural to get defensive and explain why the tourist's complaint isn't legitimate but that never gets you anywhere. Instead, the VIC manager should embrace each criticism received as an opportunity to strengthen a relationship. A person who complains probably has interest in continuing his relationship with the VIC, if the problem is efficiently handled.

b. VIC Officials

Complaint handling should be undertaken by the Manager/Coordinator wherever possible and in accordance with procedures that ensure fairness and equity for all. Tourism officers will air grievances feeling management has been unfair to them.

When the inevitable complaints come, it's natural to get defensive and explain why the person's complaint isn't legitimate but that never gets you anywhere. Instead, the VIC manager should embrace each criticism received, whether from employee or tourist, as an opportunity to strengthen a relationship.

It is advisable that all the steps of the complaint handling process should be recorded in writing and a complaints register developed. Below is a five-step approach to assisting with complaints.

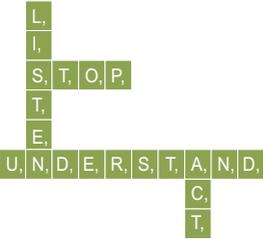
STEP	DESCRIPTION
<p>Listen and Understand</p> 	<p>First, always listen to the person. They are concerned about something. Let go of the temptation to respond in any quick fashion. Take the time to listen and truly understand what is driving their concern. It also helps to ask the complainant as to what kind of solution they would like before you propose the solution.</p>
<p>Empathy</p> 	<p>Once you have listened to their concern immediately empathise with their position to create a bond between you and that person so that they know you have heard their concern and are going to work with them to resolve the issue</p>
<p>Offer a Solution</p> 	<p>Always focus on what you can do to assist as opposed to what you cannot. There is always a solution. It may not be exactly what they are asking for, but if you focus on what you can do versus denying them their requested remedy you have still offered a solution and often merely having another option is sufficient to remedy the situation</p>
<p>Execute the Solution</p> 	<p>Solve their problem be it with their originally requested resolution or an alternative you have proposed</p>
<p>Follow Up</p> 	<p>Once you have gone through the first four steps, make sure to follow up with them to make sure that they are satisfied with the solution and that you have taken care of their concern.</p>

Table 8: Example of approaches to handling complaints

BRANDING



8. BRANDING

8.1 COLLATERAL

The standardisation of Brand for Visitor Information Centres is one of the requirements for the approved National Visitor Information Centre Framework of 2011. The VIC Brand was developed in consultation with Brand South Africa to align with the national brand in such a way that there is consistent association with the national identity. Below are the elements that are incorporated into the approved brand:

- incorporation of the i-sign as an internationally recognised symbol for an information point;
- type of information point;
- unique identifier or a security feature to curb abuse and those features includes: location, unique registration number

Should the National Brand roll out plan be approved VICs across the country will be receiving some of the brand items. Should there be particular brand items that a VIC would like to request they should follow their relevant procurement procedures to go about for funding to purchase such branded items.



Figure 2: Approved VIC Branding Logo

8.2 SIGNAGE

The VIC should have an after-business-hour or call centre number that should be clearly displayed and can be contacted in the case of an emergency. Businesses must ensure that adequate signage is installed to ensure safe and easy access to the property from main or shire roads. Where necessary, it is recommended that appropriate additional directional signage be installed on the property itself and it should be clear, visible and correct. VICs should ensure that they comply with their respective municipal signage policies at all times.

CAPACITY BUILDING



9. CAPACITY BUILDING FOR VIC OFFICIALS

Capacity building is about educating yourself and growth for the future. When the opportunity arises for a tourism officer or manager to attend a particular training course they should nominate candidates to attend as training can assist with acquiring skills including identifying a communications strategy, improving volunteer recruitment, developing a leadership succession plan, identifying more efficient uses of technology, and collaborating with community partners. Capacity building is vitally important. VICs should ensure that they follow correct protocol and procedures to obtain approval for attending training courses well in advance or as required by their relevant managing authority.

Capacity building for VIC officials is one of the requirements of the approved VIC Framework. The purpose of developing the training module that was implemented is to capacitate the VIC's frontline officials to undertake effective tourism promotion and marketing including dissemination of information to the tourists.

It is always advisable for VIC management to identify development gaps for VIC staff and ensure that training is provided where possible. It is recommended that the VIC management select officials on a rotational basis to attend training. There should however be guidelines or a policy incorporated for staff behaviour when attending such training and related staff development matters. There are a number of formal and informal training courses that may be undertaken by a VIC official. Courses may be specific short courses or comprehensive certificate and diploma programmes. Basic recommended courses for Tourism Officials and Managers.

TRAINING	DESCRIPTION
Visitor Information Centre Operations and Management	To effectively disseminate and manage a tourism information Centre
Emergency & Evacuation Procedures	How to plan for workplace Emergencies and Evacuations
First Aid	Becoming trained personnel to assist a sick or injured person until definitive medical treatment can be accessed
Service Excellence	Ensuring that the provision of service is a seamless and efficient process including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Service • Telephone etiquette • Courtesy
Table 9. Example of VIC Training / Capacity building Interventions	

This handbook has provided basic guidelines to operating a VIC in a standardised approach and will be used for operational purposes in areas where it is found to be applicable in the context of each VIC. The idea behind using the handbook as a guide for practice is to promote service excellence from VICs and this will in turn promote tourism growth in South Africa. The National Department of Tourism reserves the right to effect updates to this document without prior notice to the tourism stakeholders.

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