

## Arkansas bureau recruits athletes

Thirty students from the University of Central Arkansas have been signed to “Name, Image and Likeness” (NIL) agreements with the Conway Convention & Visitors Bureau, the group announced.

Conway CVB said it is the first public entity in the country to enter into NCAA NIL agreements. The plan is to utilize the student athletes as ambassadors for the city’s “quality of place,” touting Conway’s amenities to residents and visitors.

State legislators passed an NIL law this past session. It goes into law on Jan. 1, 2022. It allows athletes at institutions of higher education to be compensated for their name, image and likeness.

“Conway is a growing college town with great restaurants and parks. We have a lot to offer students, visitors, and young professionals,” said Rachel Shaw, Executive Director of the Conway Convention & Visitors Bureau. “No one is in a better position to explain what it’s like to move here and thrive than this group.”

The 30-person inaugural group will equitably represent all men’s and women’s sports. In the coming weeks, individual athletes will go through a selection process with the CVB and begin to promote the city through video testimonials, ad campaigns, and their own social media accounts.

Shaw estimates that most of the students will earn between \$500 to \$2,000 during their time in the program.

– *talkbusiness.net*



## Airfare promotion continues to draw fire

Tennessee paid thousands of dollars for social media influencers to promote a contentious new initiative that uses \$2.5 million in taxpayer dollars to offer flight vouchers largely to out-of-state residents.

According to documents obtained through a public records request, the Department of Tourist Development paid an estimated \$11,000 to at least 11 local influencers to post on Instagram, Facebook and TikTok touting the new program. Emails show the state had originally budgeted \$30,000 for influencers.

To date, the state has spent more than \$230,000 out of its \$270,000 tourism marketing budget to advertise the program online. That has raised eyebrows among

both Republican leaders and Democratic lawmakers wondering why tax dollars are being spent on tourists’ airfare.

The program has faced even further scrutiny after it was unveiled around the 4th of July holiday weekend just days after Republican Gov. Bill Lee halted extra federal unemployment aid for low-income Tennesseans who had been affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. The reveal — which included a promotional video with country music star Brad Paisley — caught state leaders off guard, sparking the Tourism Commissioner Mark Ezell to later apologize last month to a legislative panel on his agency’s rollout of the program.

– *Associated Press*

## DMOs face questions about influencer spending

**Media outlets have been raising questions about the amount marketing agencies have spent on social influencers. Here are two examples:**

As the country locked down and people lost their jobs, public records reveal some social media

influencers gained work from the government.

A WCNC Charlotte investigation found the **South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism** and the **Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority** paid  
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## Texas TV station cites spending of tax dollars

**An Austin, Texas, TV station recently addressed the state's payments to influencers. Here are excerpts from the story:**

The State of Texas is using taxpayer money to fund influencer marketing campaigns that promote travel to the state.

Since 2019, Texas has used taxpayer money on 25 social media influencer marketing campaigns. That cost a total of \$118,267.40.

Jane Ko runs one of Austin's most popular Instagram accounts: A Taste of Koko. Since she started blogging about Austin 11 years ago, her account has grown to more than 100,000 followers.

A spokesperson for the Office of the Governor's Economic Development and Tourism Division sent KVUE the following statement in response:

"Travel Texas partners with social media content creators, often referred to as influencers, to highlight the state as a destination of choice for travelers. Content partnerships with Travel Texas are thoroughly vetted by the experts at our social media agency to ensure they will deliver a return on investment in line with industry standards for successful content views and engagement. Influencer content is an effective way to highlight many different aspects of travel around the state of Texas to highly tailored audiences based on their personal interests, location, age and more."

The spokesperson for Travel Texas said in 2019, \$83 billion in travel spending led to a \$169.8 billion impact on the Texas economy.

– kvue.com

## DMOs face questions about influencer spending

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influencers thousands of dollars to write blogs and post pictures and videos to attract visitors during the COVID-19 pandemic.

South Carolina reports the state spent a combined \$56,000 paying and reimbursing two dozen influencers from March 16, 2020, through June 30, 2021. Corporate Communications Director Sam Queen said the amount the state spent on a handful of influencer campaigns is nearly the equivalent of what it costs to buy a full-page regional ad in Southern Living.

"It was really something that allowed us to pivot quickly so that we could continue to drive interest in South Carolina as a tourism destination. We really feel like we're getting a good return on that investment," Queen said.

While there's no evidence anyone visited South Carolina as a direct result, Queen said the program's overall average engagement rate of 7.34%, well above the industry standard, is proof the campaigns worked. She said the state reached more than 2.4 million potential

visitors through its influencer program between September 2019 and May 2021.

– wncn.com

The **Fairfax County (VA) Economic Development Authority** gave nearly \$29,000 to 10 social media influencers over the past year to highlight its jobs portal and virtual career fairs.

The campaign primarily involved Instagram users posting about events with hashtags and links to drive traffic. Economic development officials said the effort was intended to develop its brand as well as the region's job market and engage target audiences, specifically with Millennials in mind.

"We felt like we needed to do some experimentation," FCEDA President and CEO Victor Hoskins said.

The FCEDA is not unique in using social media personalities to reach potential audiences. Other governmental bodies have turned to social media influencers for tourism marketing as well as running COVID-19 messaging.

– tysonsreporter.com