

The Texas Department of State Health Services, Vital Statistics Unit (VSU) hosted the 2012 Regional Conferences, co-sponsored by the Texas Public Health Association (TPHA). This year the conferences were held during the week of June 11-15, 2012 in Odessa, Arlington, and Corpus Christi.

The Vital Statistics Unit is responsible for coordinating vital registration in Texas to ensure a standardized and uniform system statewide. Education and training are important components of ensuring that vital registration laws, procedures and processes are followed accurately. The VSU Regional Conferences provide in-person learning opportunities that vital registration partners may not have access to otherwise. Although VSU hosts an annual conference in Austin every December, many are unable to attend due to cost, travel and time constraints.

The regional conferences provide an essential service for VSU partners involved in vital registration. Attendees receive updated information and training to help improve the security, accuracy, timeliness, statutory compliance, and efficiency of registering vital events. Relationships are created and renewed through interactions between VSU Field Services staff and attendees. Attendees have an opportunity to ask specific questions, and share unique concerns from their office with VSU staff. Attendees interact, connect and learn from other partners and colleagues in the field. In addition, attendees fulfill the training requirement for the Five Star award offered each year by VSU.

Attendees at the 2012 Regional Conferences included staff from local registration offices, county & district clerk offices, justice of the peace offices, hospitals and birthing centers, and funeral homes. At some locations attendees also included medical examiners, physician staff, and others. In total, there were 47 attendees in Odessa, 123 attendees in Arlington, and 98 attendees in Corpus Christi.

Attendees were given the opportunity to attend concurrent sessions from three educational tracks: Birth Registration, Death Registration, and Local Registration. The Birth Registration track provided sessions related to registering birth certificates, and was designed for birth registrars, hospital staff and midwives. Death Registration track provided sessions related to registering death certificates and was designed for funeral homes and medical certifiers (physicians, medical examiners, and justices of the peace). Lastly, the Local Registration track provided sessions related to registering and issuing vital records and was designed for local registrars and county clerks. Each track included a session for using the Texas Electronic Registrar (TER) and a session covering current statutes and codes. Additional sessions were included, based on the specific needs of the track. For example, the Birth Registration track included a session for Acknowledgment of Paternity (AOP) certification and the Local Registration track included a session on passports, conducted by members from the Houston Passport Agency and Dallas Passport Agency.

Continuing Education Units (CEUs) were available to attendees who needed credits for their professional licensures. Prior approval for awarding CEUs was received from the following entities: American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA), County and District Clerks Association of Texas (CDCAT), Texas Funeral Services Commission (TFSC), and the Texas Justice Court Training Center (TJCTC). A total of 14 attendees received CEUs for AHIMA, 13 attendees received CEUs for CDCAT; 7 attendees received CEUs for TFSC, and 17 attendees received CEUs for the TJCTC.

Several on-site exhibits were displayed during the conference. ImmTrac provided local representatives who exhibited information on the Texas Immunization Registry at each location, providing educational materials and answering questions. VSU displayed information on the upcoming Birth Registrar Certification (BRC), scheduled to be implemented 1/1/2013. Materials for BRC were provided in an effort to roll out information to birth registrars and hospitals prior to the date of implementation. Representatives with Antares also exhibited information regarding their technological solutions during the conference in Corpus Christi.

Overall Results

Overall Conference Evaluations were given to everyone attending the conference. In total, 65% (172) of the overall evaluations were submitted, providing important feedback for future conferences and training efforts. The following cumulative results of the Overall Conference Evaluations submitted are an average of all responses received for that particular question. Respondents were asked to evaluate different conference elements by rating them on a scale of 1 – 5 with 1 being *Strongly Disagree* and 5 being *Strongly Agree*.

Registration

The registration process was easy and user friendly	4.7
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Conference Content

The sessions addressed important topics and issues	4.7
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The content of the conference sessions was informative	4.7
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The information I learned will be helpful for my work	4.7
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Continuing Education Units, if applicable

The process for obtaining my professional CEUs was easy	4.5
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The conference met my continuing education needs	4.5
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Overall Conference

The meeting rooms were conducive for learning	4.5
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I am satisfied with the overall organization of the conference	4.6
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Additional Comments

Several open-ended questions were included for additional feedback. The following is a summary of the comments for each question.

“Would you recommend this conference to others?”

Of the 172 evaluations that were submitted, all respondents selected “yes”, they would recommend the conference to others. This response indicates that the attendees value the regional conference and feel that others would also benefit by attending the conference. Some of the comments explaining why they recommend the conference to others included:

- “Very informative and helpful.”
- “Every year there are new updates to learn.”
- “It helped me and I know it would help someone else.”
- “Great source of valuable information.”
- “It is essential to performing job duties well.”
- “The small class size lends itself to better learning opportunities.”

What aspects of the conference were most helpful?

- “Meeting state staff; putting faces with names.”
- “The providing of new/updated statutes.”
- “All aspects of the conference were helpful to do my job.”
- “The statutes session. The book will be very helpful.”
- “The passport session.”
- “All classes. Good comprehensive review. Lots of good updates.”
- “Being with others and learning from questions and answers.”
- “Obtaining the Statutes & Codes manual.”
- “Always enjoy the regional conference since they are close to home.”
- “Saves time out of the office and budget travel funds”

What aspects of this conference would you suggest changing for the future? Why?

- Location (Several request were made for Amarillo and the Rio Grande Valley)
- “More hands on sessions, like actually completing example forms. It helps me remember.”
- “Shorter session times.”
- “Shorter lunch time.”
- “More question and answer sessions.”

What topics do you recommend for future conferences?

- Fraud
- Session on identification - especially supporting or secondary forms
- Information on Marriage Certificates

Conclusion

The 2012 VSU Regional Conferences ran smoothly and were considered a success by all involved. The positive feedback received during the conferences was later confirmed by the results of the Overall Conference Evaluations. Despite the huge effort of hosting the Regional Conferences each year, it is apparent that the time, resources and financial expenditures are worth the cost. Attendees walk away from the conference better informed and educated about vital registration and their specific responsibilities. In addition, the regional conferences provide invaluable opportunities to foster stronger connections between the staff from the VSU State office and vital statistics partners across the state. Increasing the knowledge and strengthening the connections between all vital registration partners creates a stronger, more secure registration system which ultimately is used to improve the health and well-being of Texas.