

ALLEGANY COUNTY TOURISM STRATEGIC PLAN



**ALLEGANY
COUNTY**
THE
MOUNTAIN SIDE
OF MARYLAND

MDMOUNTAINSIDE.COM

AUGUST 2025



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	3
Background	4
Situational Analysis.....	5
Research	5
SWOT Analysis	8
Strategic Goals.....	11
Key Initiative 1 Elevate Tourism’s Visibility and Economic Influence	12
Key Initiative 2 Strengthen Downtown Cumberland and Frostburg as Trail-Connected Destinations	16
Key Initiative 3 Enhance Stakeholder Communication and Strengthen Partnerships	19
Key Initiative 4 Advance Signature Destination Development Projects	21
Key Initiative 5 Broaden the Visitor Base through Diverse Tourism Strategies	24

This Strategic Plan was funded through the Maryland Department of Commerce Office of Tourism’s funding received through the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration’s (EDA) \$750 million American Rescue Plan: Travel, Tourism & Outdoor Recreation program.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dear Community Stakeholders, Partners, and Supporters,

Tourism is more than a weekend getaway, scenic views and unforgettable trail rides; it is a powerful economic engine that drives vitality, supports local jobs, and enhances the quality of life in Allegany County, the Mountain Side of Maryland. It's about connection to place, people, and purpose.

Allegany County Tourism is excited to share with you its strategic vision and plan - a bold, forward-thinking roadmap that reflects where we're headed as a destination and a community. It's rooted in collaboration, driven by data, and guided by the belief that tourism creates the greatest impact when it's thoughtfully planned, inclusive, and aligned with the needs of both visitors and residents.

We're excited to share this plan with you, including a renewed and focused Mission Statement that gets to the heart of what we do.

ALLEGANY COUNTY TOURISM MISSION STATEMENT:

Allegany County Tourism fuels the local economy by connecting visitors to our trails, towns, and natural beauty—and by building partnerships that strengthen our community.

This Mission sets the direction and course for how we serve Allegany County.

THE ROLE OF ALLEGANY COUNTY TOURISM:

Destination Leadership – Bring partners together under a shared vision and destination strategy.

Destination Marketing – Be the voice for inspiring visitors to come to Allegany County.

Destination Management – Positively influence how Allegany County can always be appealing to visitors and support sustainable development.

At the heart of our new strategic plan are five big priorities:

- **Raising the profile and impact of tourism**—so more people recognize it as a vital part of our local economy and quality of life.
- **Showcasing our downtowns as vibrant trail towns**—where adventure, culture, and small business meet.
- **Deepening partnerships and strengthening communication**—because when we move together, we go further.
- **Tapping into the potential of transformational projects such as the River Park at Canal Place**—a project that will redefine how residents and visitors experience Cumberland and beyond.
- **Welcoming a broader, more diverse visitor base**—and making sure everyone feels they belong here in the Mountain Side of Maryland.

Tourism already delivers big results here: supporting hundreds of jobs, infusing millions into our local economy, and helping our small businesses thrive. But with smart investment, meaningful storytelling, and aligned vision, we have the power to grow this impact, by attracting visitors year-round, celebrating what makes our communities unique, and reinvesting in the places that matter most.

This plan is not a final destination. It's a roadmap, or trail as we like to say around here. It's a living document to guide our work, measure our progress, and inspire new ideas. With your continued partnership support, we will ensure Allegany County, the Mountain Side of Maryland, is not only a place people visit, but a place people fall in love with, come back to, invest in, and tell their friends about.

Thank you for believing in the power of tourism and the future of our destination.

Ashli Workman, Director of Tourism
Allegany County Government

BACKGROUND

Allegheny County, the Mountain Side of Maryland, affectionately known as Mountain Maryland, has established itself as a multidimensional destination, offering rich experiences in outdoor recreation, history and heritage, arts and culture, and natural scenic beauty. As a division of Allegheny County Economic and Community Development, Allegheny County Tourism serves as the county's official destination marketing organization, funded through a percentage of the visitor-paid hotel/motel tax. The organization operates with a regional mindset while remaining committed to promoting Allegheny County as a premier travel destination.

Since 2017, the office has grown in both staff capacity and influence, expanding from one full-time employee to a dedicated team of three. Throughout that growth, the tourism office has built a trusted brand, deepened relationships with local stakeholders, and played a significant role in tourism-related economic development. This Strategic Plan serves to build on that momentum by identifying clear priorities, organizing strategic goals, and outlining actionable steps to guide tourism marketing and destination development over the next three to five years.

The development of this plan involved a comprehensive process led by Chandlerthinks, a place-branding and tourism strategy firm familiar with the region. The process included a destination audit, marketing assessment, and visitor profile analysis, as well as input from lodging and attraction partners, frontline workers, and local stakeholders. A robust series of stakeholder interviews and visioning sessions ensured diverse perspectives were included in shaping the plan. The resulting roadmap is both strategic and tactical—designed to strengthen Allegheny County's competitiveness, respond to visitor trends, and guide smart, sustainable growth across the tourism sector.





SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Allegheny County Tourism is seeking a strategic plan that will provide a roadmap to help maintain, enhance, and inspire Allegheny County, the Mountain Side of Maryland's competitive positioning relative to the destination's markets. The plan needs to establish clear goals and objectives as they relate to the mission of the office, which is to 'fuel the local economy by connecting people to our trails, towns, and natural beauty—and by building partnerships that strengthen our community.'



RESEARCH

PURPOSE

Allegheny County Tourism commissioned a comprehensive research initiative to guide the creation of a 5-year strategic plan aimed at enhancing the county's competitive positioning, strengthening destination awareness, and increasing visitor stays and spending. Combined, these studies provide a comprehensive view of the county's tourism economy from both the visitor and business perspectives.

MDMOUNTAINSIDE.COM



RESEARCH

WORK COMPLETED

The research process included both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a holistic view of Allegany County's tourism landscape:

- **Inventory & Asset Research** – Comprehensive review of attractions, amenities, and tourism infrastructure.
- **Stakeholder Engagement** – Three focus groups with 30 participants and 18 in-depth interviews to gather insider perspectives.
- **On-Site Familiarization (FAM) Tour** – Direct evaluation of visitor experiences and tourism readiness.
- **Digital Audit** – Analysis of online presence, search visibility, and marketing performance.
- **Marketing Assessment & Competitive Analysis** – Benchmarking against regional competitors to identify strengths and gaps.
- **Visitor Profile Study** – Survey of 300 visitors to understand demographics, trip motivations, spending, and satisfaction.
- **Human Movement Data (Placer AI)** – Location-based data to track visitor origins, volumes, and patterns.
- **Survey** – Insights from 19 accommodations on occupancy trends, guest profiles, and seasonality.
- **Retail, Restaurant & Attraction Survey** – Feedback from 96 businesses on tourism's impact and improvement opportunities.
- **SWOT Analysis** – Identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.



RESEARCH

KEY RESEARCH TAKEAWAYS:

- **Growing Tourism Culture** – The local tourism sector is expanding, bringing both opportunities and challenges.
- **Funding & Resource Constraints** – Grant funding has temporarily boosted capacity, but sustainable future funding is uncertain.
- **Leadership Recognition** – Allegany County Tourism is respected as a professional, resourceful, and knowledgeable leader in the field.
- **Economic Dependence on Tourism** – Most retail, restaurant, and attraction operators report they could not survive without visitor spending.
- **Product Development Opportunities** – Downtown Cumberland is emerging as a viable tourism product; Downtown Frostburg is already established as a strong draw; The River Park Project in Cumberland has significant long-term potential.
- **Visitor Profile** – Primarily family-oriented outdoor enthusiasts within a 150-mile radius.
- **Competitive Environment** – Outdoor recreation is a strong asset but highly competitive, requiring differentiation to stand out in the market.

See the appendix for executive summaries.



SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

- **Respected Leadership:** Allegany County Tourism is led by a well-regarded team with strong credibility in the local business and civic community.
- **Positive Growth Trajectory:** The tourism sector is evolving as a result of sustained growth and past success, positioning the county for continued momentum.
- **Established Tourism Assets:** The Great Allegheny Passage (GAP), C&O Canal Towpath, Western Maryland Scenic Railroad, and Rocky Gap Casino/State Park are mature and reliable tourism drivers that anchor the visitor experience.
- **Vibrant Trail Towns:** Downtown Cumberland is emerging as a key destination hub, while Downtown Frostburg has an established identity and visitor appeal.
- **Rich Heritage & Stakeholder Energy:** The county is home to a strong collection of heritage assets and enthusiastic stakeholders, creating prime conditions for product development and strategic marketing.
- **Effective Outdoor Marketing:** Current marketing efforts have successfully driven interest in outdoor recreation and trail-based experiences—contributing to an estimated \$800,000 per mile economic impact.
- **Expansive Natural Resources:** Allegany County boasts a wide range of outdoor assets ideal for hiking, biking, paddling, rock climbing, and year-round exploration.
- **Loyal Visitor Base:** The region benefits from a strong base of repeat visitors, reflecting high satisfaction and continued interest in the destination.



SWOT ANALYSIS

WEAKNESSES

- **Limited Funding:** Tourism initiatives are constrained by the lack of consistent and scalable funding sources at both the local and state levels.
- **Limited Resources:** The tourism office operates with limited personnel and support infrastructure, which hinders the ability to expand programming and marketing efforts.
- **Tourism Value Perception:** There remains a noticeable gap in community-wide understanding of tourism's economic and social impact, leading to underinvestment and limited advocacy from some stakeholders. Tourism stakeholders are not well connected to each other.
- **Highly Competitive Outdoor Market:** Outdoor and recreation-based tourism has grown rapidly across Appalachian communities, making it increasingly difficult for Allegany County to differentiate itself in a crowded regional market.
- **Seasonal Tourism Decline:** Visitation significantly decreases during the winter months, presenting challenges for year-round economic impact and business sustainability.



SWOT ANALYSIS

OPPORTUNITIES

- **Increased Funding Potential:** Opportunities exist to diversify and grow funding through grants, partnerships, tourism reinvestment strategies, and public-private collaborations.
- **Tourism Product Development:** There is strong potential to develop new tourism experiences and infrastructure—particularly around outdoor recreation, heritage, and cultural assets.
- **Enhanced Marketing & Positioning:** Strategic branding and targeted marketing campaigns can strengthen Allegany County’s visibility and competitiveness in regional and national markets.
- **Destination Development Momentum:** The upcoming River Park at Canal Place project has generated significant anticipation and is widely viewed as a transformational asset for downtown Cumberland, with the potential to drive both local pride and visitor growth.
- **Frostburg’s Collegiate Influence:** Frostburg State University offers unique opportunities to develop intercollegiate tourism products, academic collaborations, and seasonal programming that can help counterbalance off-season visitation lulls.

THREATS

- **Uncertain Economic Climate:** Broader economic challenges—such as inflation, labor shortages, and consumer spending trends—could negatively impact travel decisions and tourism-related business sustainability.
- **Insecure Tourism Funding:** Tourism funding lacks a dedicated allocation at both the state and local levels, making it vulnerable to budget cuts and political shifts.
- **Business Dependence on Tourism:** Many local restaurants, retailers, and attractions rely heavily on tourism dollars. A decline in visitation could threaten the viability of these businesses.
- **Loss of One-Time Funds:** Recent marketing initiatives were supported by temporary federal relief funds (ARPA), which are no longer available, creating a funding gap moving forward.





STRATEGIC GOALS

Ultimately, the goal of Allegany County Tourism is to create an economic stimulant for the community in direct visitor spending. Specific measurable goals for this plan are:

- Increase visitor spending by 5-7% in three years, as reported by the state.
- Maintain stakeholder/community support above 60% through stakeholder participation measurements.
- Increase off-season (November-March) visitation by 10% over next 3-5 years to support year-round viability.
- Achieve a visitor satisfaction score of 70% or higher.

KEY INITIATIVES

Listed below are the key initiatives to help achieve the strategic goals:

1. Elevate Tourism's Visibility and Economic Influence
2. Strengthen Downtown Cumberland and Frostburg as Trail-Connected Destinations
3. Enhance Stakeholder Communications and Partnerships
4. Advance Signature Destination Development Projects
5. Broaden the Visitor Profile through Diverse Tourism Strategies

KEY INITIATIVE 1

ELEVATE TOURISM'S VISIBILITY AND ECONOMIC INFLUENCE

Position tourism as a vital economic driver by building advocacy, increasing visibility, and educating the public and stakeholders about its role in supporting local quality of life.

A. Refine the Mission Statement to Include Community Value and the Role of Allegany County Tourism

Current Mission Statement:

Allegany County Tourism enhances the quality of life in Allegany County, Maryland, and strengthens destination awareness through promotion, development, and services that attract visitors to stay longer and spend more in our community.

Enhanced Refined Mission Statement:

Allegany County's Tourism fuels the local economy by connecting visitors to our trails, towns, and natural beauty—and by building partnerships that strengthen our community.

This positions tourism not just as marketing professionals but as a driver of the economy that makes the community stronger.





KEY INITIATIVE 1

This sets the tone to clearly define the role of Allegany County tourism:

Destination Leadership - Bring partners together under a shared vision and destination strategy.

Destination Marketing – Be the voice for inspiring visitors to come to Allegany County.

Destination Management – Positively influence how Allegany County can always be appealing to visitors and support sustainable development.

B. Launch a ‘Tourism Ambassador Program’

Empower those who interact most with visitors—store clerks, restaurant servers, hotel staff, volunteers—to be confident, informed, and welcoming representatives of Allegany County.

- Components may include a certification process (online or in-person) which covers local history, area attractions, directions, etiquette, customer service tips.
- Develop an onboarding toolkit for employers with quick tourism facts and key contact points. Celebrate ambassadors publicly through quarterly features or an annual Tourism Ambassador Award.



KEY INITIATIVE 1

C. Build a Coalition-Driven Awareness Campaign

Create a grassroots movement that demonstrates the positive impact of tourism on employment, local business success, infrastructure development, and community pride.

- Launch a branded campaign such as “Tourism Works Here” or “Tourism Builds Allegany” or “Tourism Powers Our Community”
- Develop a cohesive branded awareness series (ex. videos, infographics, print ads) spotlighting local jobs supported by tourism, economic revenue generated, and real-life testimonials tied to tourism from small business owners, hoteliers, and residents about how tourism has transformed livelihoods and perspectives within the community.
- Distribute campaign assets through multiple channels, including social media, newsletters, local media, and presentations at community meetings to maximize reach and engagement.

D. Create a “Faces of Tourism” profile series

Highlight small businesses, hospitality staff, and event organizers to humanize and localize the impact of tourism. Distribute campaign assets through multiple channels, including social media, newsletters, local media, and presentations at community meetings to maximize reach and engagement.

E. Present quarterly economic impact updates

Share success metrics (visitor numbers, spending, tax revenue) in accessible formats with visuals and testimonials. Present data in accessible formats, including: infographic one-pagers, digital dashboards and visuals paired with testimonials. Include annual metrics on visitor volume, tourism-related employment, and tax contributions.

KEY INITIATIVE 1

F. Performance Research

- **Stakeholder Tourism Performance and Participation Research**

To ensure continuous improvement and strategic focus, Allegany County Tourism should conduct an annual survey of its tourism partners. This survey should assess: the effectiveness of the tourism office’s leadership, marketing, and communication efforts—and also check the overall health of the tourism economy in Allegany County. This may include metrics such as: visitor spending, residents and visitors’ satisfaction, brand perception, and how tourism benefits the community. Insights gathered will help guide future plans, budgeting priorities, and reinforce the tourism office’s role in growing the local economy.

- **Visitors Satisfaction**

In addition to stakeholder feedback, Allegany County Tourism should continue administering the Visitor Satisfaction Survey every two years with a strategic benchmark of maintaining a satisfaction score of 70% or higher. This survey serves as a key performance indicator, capturing direct feedback from travelers regarding their experiences with local amenities, attractions, customer service, wayfinding, and overall destination appeal.

Initiative #1 Suggested KPIs:

- % increase in visitor spending (target: +5–7% over 3 years)
- Number of tourism-related earned media stories/placements
- Impressions and engagement from tourism awareness campaigns
- Participation in Tourism Ambassador Program
- Number of “Faces of Tourism” profiles published
- Frequency and reach of economic impact updates (e.g., infographic views, newsletter opens)





KEY INITIATIVE 2

STRENGTHEN DOWNTOWN CUMBERLAND AND FROSTBURG AS TRAIL-CONNECTED DESTINATIONS

Reinforce the “Trail Starts Here” brand by more prominently featuring Downtown Cumberland and Frostburg as vibrant, welcoming gateways for trail users and visitors.

A. Position Downtown Cumberland and Frostburg as key trail towns

- Update digital and printed materials to elevate Downtown Cumberland and Frostburg as vibrant, walkable trail town destinations rich in local culture, amenities, and charm.
- Revise visitor guides, websites, and social media content to spotlight the towns’ unique personalities and experiences.
- Feature high-quality images of each downtown area showing trail signage, public art, local cafes, and bike racks.
- Create downloadable trail-to-town maps that show seamless transitions from trailheads into downtown corridors.
- Add curated itineraries that combine trail segments with nearby attractions, restaurants, and overnight accommodations.
- Highlight trail-friendly amenities such as repair stations, water refill spots, and bike-friendly lodging.





KEY INITIATIVE 2

B. Support themed experiences around the trailheads

Encourage the development of compelling, themed experiences and seasonal events that begin or end in downtown Cumberland and Frostburg designed to engage trail users and drive local spending.

While Allegany County Tourism may not lead these efforts directly, the DMO can play a supporting role by:

- Collaborating with Main Street programs, downtown associations, chamber of commerce and/or the private sector to inspire and coordinate experiences.
- Providing marketing support and regional visibility through digital promotion, media outreach, and event listings.
- Aligning storytelling and branding with the “Trail Starts Here” campaign.

Sample Experience Concepts (led by local partners):

- “Pedal & Pint” – Bike tours ending with a tasting flight at local breweries, possibly paired with live music or food trucks.
- “Trail & Tale” – Self-guided or docent-led walking tours focusing on the towns’ railroad and canal history, with stops at landmarks and museums.
- “Rails to Retail” – Monthly events featuring discounts, pop-up shops, or extended business hours in downtown retail districts for trail users.
- “Bike & Bites” – Culinary sampling tours where riders can try appetizers or small plates at multiple eateries.

These efforts, when driven by local stakeholders and supported by the DMO, create a more vibrant trail-to-town experience while respecting organizational roles.

KEY INITIATIVE 2

C. Foster Trail-Friendly Business Engagement

Cultivate stronger alignment between local businesses and the trail experience by encouraging and supporting “trail-friendly” practices that welcome and serve trail users. While Allegany County Tourism may not lead these efforts directly, the DMO can play a supporting role by:

Promoting businesses that actively welcome trail users through features such as window decals, digital spotlights, blog posts, and social media campaigns under the “**Trail Starts Here**” brand. Encouraging hospitality-forward services such as water refill stations, bike parking, gear repair referrals, and rider/hiker specials. Offering optional frontline hospitality training in collaboration with trail and tourism partners, to help staff confidently assist trail users with local navigation, amenities, and services. Recognizing and celebrating businesses that go above and beyond in serving the trail community.

Initiative #2 Suggested KPIs:

- Number of new trail-to-town itineraries published or downloaded
- Number of trail-oriented downtown events supported or promoted
- Quantity and engagement with “Trail Starts Here” digital content
- Partner-reported increases in downtown foot traffic or trail-user sales
- Trail town mentions in travel media, blogs, or influencer content





KEY INITIATIVE 3

ENHANCE STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATION AND STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS

Strengthen relationships and foster deeper collaboration through structured engagement, shared resources, and consistent communication with tourism partners — driving collective success and alignment across the county.

A. Reinstate a Tourism Summit

Reintroduce a consistent, in-person gathering that brings together key tourism stakeholders, business owners, and community leaders to align around goals and celebrate progress.

- Annual Allegany County Tourism Summit: Focus on strategy and planning. Topics might include upcoming campaigns, tourism trends, key visitor data, and new marketing or grant opportunities. Feature success stories, tourism awards, partner recognitions, and skill-building workshops.

Deliverable: Branded, well-promoted events with strong attendance meaningful networking, and cross-sector engagement.

B. Host “Open Mic” Partner Meetings

Create opportunities for informal, recurring meetings for tourism-related businesses and organizations to connect, share ideas, and build community.

Format: Coffee meetups, casual virtual calls, or rotating hosted drop-in sessions.

Purpose: Share updates, preview seasonal initiatives, promote collaboration, and provide an open forum for ideas and feedback.

Benefit: Sustains year-round communication, encourages collaboration, and strengthens stakeholder alignment.

KEY INITIATIVE 3

C. Host Tourism Partner Roundtables

Facilitate in-person discussions to strengthen partnerships, feedback, and maintain county-wide representation.

- **Format:** Rotate meeting locations to spotlight different parts of the county.
- **Topics:** Campaign performance, collaborative initiatives, seasonal planning and upcoming tourism priorities.

Impact: Encourages open dialogue, strengthens geographic inclusivity, and gives partners a meaningful role in tourism strategy.

D. Build a tourism partner toolkit

Equip partners with tools to amplify Allegany County's tourism brand and extended campaign reach.

Toolkit to include:

- Co-branded print and digital materials
- Pre-written social media captions and content templates
- Access to a curated photo library of local landmarks and events
- Messaging guidelines that align with Allegany County Tourism's brand

Result: Empowers partners to be brand advocates and amplifies a unified voice of the destination.

E. Launch a "Tourism Champions" recognition program

Celebrate outstanding partners or contributors who go above and beyond in supporting local tourism efforts.

- Present awards during National Travel & Tourism Week or at the Fall Tourism Summit.
- Possible categories could include: Hospitality Hero, Innovative Campaign, Partnership Excellence, and Volunteer of the Year.

Purpose: Builds pride, encourages excellence, and publicly acknowledges the critical role partners play in Allegany County's Tourism success.

Initiative #3 Suggested KPIs:

- Open and click-through rates on monthly stakeholder newsletters
- Attendance at Tourism Summits and roundtable events
- Number of partners using the Tourism Partner Toolkit
- Number of stakeholder meetings or "Open Mic" sessions hosted
- Number of partners recognized through the Tourism Champions program





KEY INITIATIVE 4

ADVANCE SIGNATURE DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

From riverside redevelopment and adaptive reuse of historic buildings to climbing access, trail town amenities, and outdoor outfitters, Allegany County Tourism plays a vital role in identifying, supporting, and promoting destination development efforts. These projects—though often led by external partners—require aligned marketing, data insights, advocacy, and storytelling to succeed. By serving as a connector, convener, and champion, the DMO helps shape the future of Mountain Maryland as a vibrant, visitor-ready destination.

A. Amplify Visibility of Transformational Projects

Promote signature destination development projects such as River Park at Canal Place, the Wills Mountain State Park, new lodging opportunities, and additional climbing infrastructure through strategic storytelling and brand-aligned content.

Key Actions:

- Create quarterly content pieces (blog, video, social) that spotlight key projects, milestones, or partners.
- Integrate project features into earned media efforts, press releases, and tourism e-newsletters.
- Develop visual asset kits (photos, renderings, descriptions) to support partner promotion and media outreach.

Goal: Strengthen public awareness and regional interest in projects that shape the future of the destination.



KEY INITIATIVE 4

B. Serve as a Connector and Development Advocate

Support the advancement of destination-defining projects by leveraging the DMO's network, research, and data to connect developers, investors, and civic partners.

Key Actions:

- Facilitate introductions between developers, property owners, agencies, and tourism stakeholders.
- Share visitor trends, seasonality, and consumer insights to inform stakeholders.
- Identify and promote high-potential opportunity sites for lodging, outfitting, or new experiences.

Outcome: A more collaborative development ecosystem that attracts investment and visitor-serving businesses.

C. Integrate Projects into Visitor Experiences and Trip Planning

Ensure new or upcoming projects are reflected across tourism marketing channels and help inspire extended stays.

Key Actions:

- Develop themed itineraries connecting new assets to lodging, dining, and cultural stops.
- Feature emerging projects in destination guides, online listings, and blog content.
- Collaborate on co-branded launch efforts or special events to drive visitation.

Outcome: Increased engagement and trip length through integrated promotion of new experiences.



KEY INITIATIVE 4

D. Promote Community and Civic Engagement

Foster community buy-in and youth connection by promoting public involvement in project storytelling and activation.

Key Actions:

- Share milestone updates with schools and youth programs; promote educational tie-ins.
- Develop short-form content that features youth and community voices (“What This Means for Our Town”).
- Highlight volunteer activities (murals, signage, cleanups) through owned and partner channels.

Impact: Deepens local pride and positions the DMO as a valued partner in community-based storytelling.

Initiative #4 Suggested KPIs:

- Number of destination development projects promoted annually
- Engagement (views, shares, open rate) with project-related content
- Number of asset kits or media materials shared with partners
- Number of introductions or connections facilitated between stakeholders
- Quantity of new itineraries or guides featuring destination development projects
- Number of local groups engaged in promotion or activation
- Visitor sentiment or satisfaction with new tourism offerings (via surveys or reviews)



KEY INITIATIVE 5

BROADEN THE VISITOR BASE THROUGH DIVERSE TOURISM STRATEGIES

Foster tourism experiences that are inclusive, welcoming, and reflective of a broader range of visitors—while intentionally reaching emerging markets. By highlighting new geographic and demographic opportunities, Allegany County can ensure that all travelers feel invited, represented, and valued on the Mountain Side of Maryland.

A. Leverage Visitor Profile Insights to Identify Gaps and Invest in Emerging Markets

Use current data and future visitor surveys to understand who is (and isn't) engaging with Allegany County—and why. Prioritize these insights to not only close existing gaps but also to identify, attract, and invest in emerging markets—whether geographic (new urban feeder cities), demographic (diverse and multigenerational travelers), or interest-based (heritage, cultural, and experiential tourism).

Demographic Insights and Untapped Audiences

Our data suggests several opportunities to expand Allegany County's visitor base by targeting both geographic and demographic gaps:

- **Geographic Expansion:** While most visitors currently travel from within a 200-mile radius, including Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C., we see potential to expand marketing into nearby urban markets just outside that radius—specifically Philadelphia and Richmond. These cities present strong feeder market opportunities for both weekend getaways and longer stays.
- **Underserved Demographic Segments:** The African American segment is underrepresented in our current visitation profile, yet national trends show this audience is increasingly engaged in outdoor recreation and cultural tourism. Intentional outreach and tailored messaging can help close this gap and invite stronger participation from this growing market.

KEY INITIATIVE 5

- **Heritage and Cultural Travelers:** Allegany County’s heritage assets—including the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad, Allegany Museum, and our historic downtowns—are currently underleveraged compared to outdoor recreation. By elevating and packaging these assets, we can appeal to history and heritage travelers, a market segment with strong growth potential that aligns with our unique offerings.

Key Actions:

- Update tourism branding, tone, and imagery to reflect this wider range of potential visitors.
- Train staff and partners on inclusive messaging practices that resonate with diverse communities.

By targeting new urban feeder markets, intentionally engaging the African American traveler, and strengthening promotion of heritage experiences alongside outdoor recreation, Allegany County can broaden its appeal, close existing demographic gaps, and position itself as a well-rounded destination.





KEY INITIATIVE 5

B. Feature diverse voices in promotional content

Center real stories from travelers of varied backgrounds to build authentic, inclusive appeal.

- Partner with content creators and influencers that will expand the destination’s visitor profile who can share first-person accounts of visiting Allegany County.
- Create video spotlights or guest blog series that showcase different cultural perspectives and travel styles (solo travelers, multigenerational families, adaptive athletes, etc.).
- Ensure photo and video representation in all materials reflects a diversity of age, race, gender identity, and physical ability.

Impact: Representation encourages more people to see themselves as welcome here.

C. Promote cultural assets and underrepresented histories

Celebrate the rich and diverse cultural heritage of Allegany County through inclusive storytelling and year-round visitor experiences.

Support the development and expansion of heritage trails, exhibits, and walking tours that highlight African American, Appalachian, immigrant, and Indigenous histories. Partner with local historians, artists, and community leaders to co-create content and experiences that ensure authenticity, respect, and community voice. Elevate cultural events, festivals, and culinary traditions that reflect the county’s diversity and foster connection, learning, and pride.

Result: A more inclusive and compelling destination experience that deepens visitor engagement and broadens the narrative of Allegany County.

Initiative #5 Suggested KPIs:

- % growth in first-time visitors or visitors from targeted zip codes/demographics to include new emerging markets: Philadelphia, PA; Richmond, VA; and/or New York, NY.
- Number of inclusive partnerships with travel content creators
- Number of cultural or heritage-based events/initiatives promoted annually
- % of tourism materials that meet diversity representation standards
- Number of local businesses/partners trained on inclusive customer service or ADA-friendly practices
- Increase in visitor satisfaction among diverse travel segments



701 Kelly Road
Cumberland, Maryland 21502

MDMOUNTAINSIDE.COM

