

2025 **Business Plan**



***Visit* Baton Rouge**

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A Letter from President & CEO Jill Kidder

Tourism has been a major driver of Baton Rouge's economy in 2024 – and with events like the five-month United States Bowling Congress (USBC) Open Championships in 2025, that momentum isn't slowing down.

Our team and industry partners stayed busy in 2024 hosting a long list of groups including the Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative, the Southeast Museums Conference and the Alliance of Area Business Publishers. Other 2024 highlights included the sold-out Savannah Banana games last March and the launch of Baton Rouge's new top-tier holiday event, Louisiana Lights.

The debut of Visit Baton Rouge's new brand in the coming months will mark the completion of all goals, objectives and tactics outlined in our 2022-2025 Strategic Plan and DestinationNEXT research. This has been an incredible accomplishment by our staff, board and various community stakeholders – but, of course, the work of destination management continues! We will continue to remain involved in projects that enhance the visitor experience, improve visitor mobility and provide leadership on travel industry issues that hold Baton Rouge back as a destination.

In 2025, I am directing our team to place more emphasis on the primary goals of the organization – increasing visitation and visitor spend.

The USBC Open Championships provide the perfect opportunity to focus on these primary goals, with more than 50,000 bowlers and their guests traveling to the Capital City from March through the end of July.

As these visitors come to spend money in our city, we are encouraging locals to help them feel welcome and informed through the launch of the Capital City Champions Academy. This online educational tool will empower frontline employees at hotels, restaurants and retail businesses – plus any other locals – to become advocates for our city.

The Visit Baton Rouge brand launch this spring brings a great opportunity to refine and elevate our local story, highlighting the everyday richness of our community. Thorough research has helped our team prioritize a new visual identity, brand positioning, audience segmentation, and messaging strategy. Now that we know exactly what resonates with our potential guests, you will see this work showcased through every touchpoint: a new marketing campaign, media placements and pitches, social content and both local and target market activations.

Looking beyond the next year, Visit Baton Rouge also continues to prioritize progress in the Capital City, working with the new Mayor-President, all five of our municipalities and key community partners on the expansion and new development of convention facilities and sports/event venues.

Visit Baton Rouge is proud to continue leading the way in making our city a better place to live, work, and play!



Jill Kidder

President & CEO



Visit Baton Rouge



Mission

The mission of Visit Baton Rouge is to increase visitation to and awareness of the Baton Rouge Area thereby enhancing economic impact.



Vision

The Baton Rouge Area will be a nationally recognized premier destination providing an excellent Louisiana experience to all visitors.

Residents of Baton Rouge will value the contributions that visitors make to the economy and quality of life.



Values

Visit Baton Rouge pledges to promote a culture of diversity, equity and inclusion through its marketing efforts, hiring practices, vendor opportunities and visitor experiences, while displaying a passion for and an appreciation of the travel and tourism industry offering an authentic Louisiana experience.



Visit Baton Rouge

Goals & Objectives

2025 Goals

- Influence visitor to spend more
- Drive visitors to stay longer
- Build local community pride

2025 Strategic Objectives

- Increase sales performance goals year over year
- Provide top-level travel industry services and experiences for our visitors and groups
- Amplify our Baton Rouge brand story to targeted audiences with unique advertising, promotions and activations
- Lead, advocate and initiate work in reshaping Baton Rouge as a top destination
- Continue to advance Visit Baton Rouge as a great place to work
- Find new revenue streams for 2027

Destination Sales

Departmental Goals

Position Baton Rouge as *the* regional meetings and convention destination

- Position Baton Rouge as a vibrant, emerging city with exciting new opportunities for various groups and industries.
 - Ensure Visit Baton Rouge continues to serve as the official resource for planning and booking meetings and events.
 - Focus on Baton Rouge's strategic location as a valuable asset for meeting planners in both the Southeast and Southwest regions.
 - Evaluate opportunities for regional focus in markets with direct flights
 - Washington, D.C., Charlotte, Atlanta, Dallas, and Houston.
 - Evaluate a sales mission in Washington, D.C.
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Generate qualified leads for hotels and the Raising Cane's River Center by targeting new meetings, groups and sporting events.

- New business is developed through staff participation in industry shows throughout the year, as well as through prospect calls and face-to-face sales visits.
 - Identify need periods through internal research tool and collaboration with hotel partners. Work to fill booking gaps.
 - Secure 400 leads and book 90,000 room nights. Room nights include confirmed bookings, occurring only after hotel contracts are signed, based on the tentative leads we receive or generate. "Leads" are defined as tentative opportunities that the sales manager qualifies and assigns to hotel partners.
 - Create mechanism for clients to offer feedback in redevelopment of Raising Canes River Center.
 - Pursue specific market segments identified as best opportunities for the Baton Rouge market, including sports, foreign individual travel, state government, state associations, higher education and fraternity.
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Grow international business

- Promote Baton Rouge as a premier travel destination to international tour operators and receptive operators through face-to-face appointments at tradeshow, sales calls and missions.
 - Identify more ways to track international bookings.
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Increase hotel occupancy through hotel stays garnered by meetings and conventions

- Work closely with clients to create a personal experience that coincides with their meeting or convention needs and requirements.
- Work with the Experience and Marketing Departments on ways to better promote and personalize conventions prior to the attendees' arrival, building longer stays and higher spend.
- Build on relationships with local hotel stakeholders to garner feedback about sales opportunities and foster conversations about customer service.
- Work to continuously clean up accounts in the CRM.

Sports Development

Departmental Goals

Host a large professional sports event

- Work with LSU to secure large professional sports that have not traditionally held events in Baton Rouge, utilizing current and future LSU facilities
 - Promote professional sports events to entice visitation, increase room night bookings, and showcase event hosting capabilities of city.
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Form a sports foundation to focus on sponsorships and volunteers

- A foundation will provide a mechanism for sponsorship solicitation and volunteer recruitment that will widen the scope of events Baton Rouge can host.
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Continue to advocate for sports facility development

- Secure commitment for development of 100,000 sq. ft. indoor facility

Destination Experience

Departmental Goals

Elevate the visitor experience through hospitality education

- Launch the Capital City Champions Academy, a complimentary online training program designed to enhance the knowledge of frontline staff members and helping them deliver the best experience to guests.
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Increase the reach of Visit Baton Rouge resources that encourage longer stays and higher spend

- Continue offering turnkey, grab-and-go resources
 - Promote our unique and curated experiences to potential meetings and events clients through social media or some type of direct promotion.
 - Engage new university students and their families as they prepare to relocate and attend school in Baton Rouge. Ensure they know what to do in our city, and see opportunities to invite their friends and family.
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Successfully host the United States Bowling Congress Open Championships

- With 50,000+ bowlers and their guests visiting this March-July, we will ensure the local hospitality community keeps our welcome message fresh.
 - Resource the hospitality community through the Capital City Champions Academy, in-person announcements, complimentary “Welcome Bowlers” buttons for all front-line staff, an informative webinar, newsletter reminders and unique touches to greet the bowlers city wide.
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Support the launch of the new brand

- Provide event logistic expertise for development and execution of brand activations
 - Update client experiences to align with overall destination image
 - Resource activations, events and client outreach with promotional items in line with new brand
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Evaluate future opportunities to elevate the overall destination experience

- Collaborate with the Marketing and Communications Department to create an engaging visitors center at the new Visit Baton Rouge headquarters at 232 Lafayette Street.
- Review the Festival and Cultural Events sponsorship program with an eye forward in light of our overall objectives to increase visitor demand and increase visitor spend, while creating community pride.
- Participate in efforts to secure high exposure events that not only bring first-time visitors, but also build local community pride.
- Continued communication and partnership with venues, promoters and key organizations within our city to secure large entertainment events.
- Work with city and cruise lines to improve riverboat experience and increase dockings.

Marketing + Communications

Departmental Goals

Launch new brand effectively into high-performing markets, activating and messaging effectively around different audience segments and personas

- Reskin website, refresh collateral and update content to reflect new brand guidelines and messaging strategy.
- Work with advertising agency to efficiently media plan, targeting around key markets and messaging in line with personas.
- Activate locally and in one key drive market, focusing on PR value, brand storytelling and consumer connection.

Connect visitors in-market with more things to do, driving longer stays and higher spend

- Install digital info kiosk & QR code signage at Raising Canes River Center to connect USBC attendees with things to do in Baton Rouge.
- Redesign airport kiosk to reflect new brand and better inform visitors as they enter the market.
- Work with Destination Experience to launch the Capital City Champions Academy, connecting frontline employees to VBR resources.

Find new ways to effectively tell brand story

- Incorporate the new brand messaging pillars into digital meetings, sports and group guides for sales team use.
- Incorporate messaging strategy into paid, earned and owned media with creative design, video and content.
- Launch a short-form video series to tell brand story and expose "hidden gems."

Connect opportunities for both sales and marketing outreach

- Showcase meetings and sports videos
- Create landing pages for weddings, reunions and corporate retreats focusing on how Visit Baton Rouge can be a resource.
- Retool all itineraries and sales profiles to reflect new brand story.
- Work with Destination Sales to segment international outreach by market, while also aligning with the overall brand story.

Build local pride through brand awareness, storytelling and local advocacy

- Work with Destination Experience to launch the Capital City Champions Academy with the goal of educating frontline tourism professionals.
- Host a media event to educate locals about the scale and impact of the United States Bowling Congress Open Championships.
- Work with Destination Experience to activate the new brand during local festivals & events
- Work with local artists to produce their interpretations of the new Visit Baton Rouge brand. Push their products and our messaging during local art-focused events like Hot Art/Cool Nights, White Light Night, Blues Fest, etc.
- Combine the brand launch, National Travel & Tourism Week celebration and 232 Lafayette Street groundbreaking for a Spring 2025 event, touting tourism's economic impact on the local community.
- Continue to nurture and develop local media relationships. Look for opportunities for both paid and earned partnerships.
- Tout economic impact with new stakeholder outreach strategy.

Leverage software & technology to share data with partners and connect with visitors

- Seamlessly integrate new technology that helps inspire travel, offers travel intenders options for booking and encourages higher spend for visitors already in-market.
- Work with research partner to push useful visitor data out to partners on a monthly basis.
- Clean up policies for photography usage and maintain consistent standards for clients and partners.
- Increase number of stakeholder meetings/communications year over year for CRM updating and awareness of VBR resources.

Administration

Departmental Goals

Maintain high compliance standards

- Continue to maintain internal controls as a political subdivision to ensure compliance as it relates to auditing standards
 - Maintain and administer financial and personnel policies and procedures set forth by Board of Directors and mandated by State and Federal law
 - Ensure compliance of mandatory training for public servants
 - Transition into an automated payroll and payables system; train management and staff on processes
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Focus on future development

- Work with Transition Team regarding purchase and renovation of Visit Baton Rouge's future office at 232 Lafayette, focusing on an ideal visitor center buildout and meeting space to accommodate clients and partners.
 - Work with Mayor/President's Committee to find a developer for the River Center improvements and headquarters hotel.
 - Work with other local economic development organizations to establish and implement Plan Baton Rouge III.
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Manage budget and identify possibilities for new revenue streams

- Continue to provide financial analysis that supports competent decision making
 - Implement a new accounting software and digitalize financial records.
 - Work with City/Parish to determine whether short-term rental occupancy tax dollars are being properly collected and disbursed to Visit Baton Rouge.
 - Research and produce plan for the possibility of a new future revenue stream.
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Enhance employee engagement

- Implement programs to make Visit Baton Rouge an even better place to work.
- Build new internal communication tactic to inform and educate employees.
- Work with internal team to make new office building a more collaborative work environment to increase employee satisfaction.

Visit Baton Rouge

2025 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Baton Rouge Lodging Association
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