

Bloomington

2023-2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

Visit Bloomington



INTRODUCTION

The Convention & Visitors Bureau of Monroe County (Visit Bloomington) was incorporated as a private, not-for-profit 501C(6) corporation in 1977. Visit Bloomington receives its operating revenues from the Monroe County Innkeeper's Tax by way of a contractual agreement with the Monroe County Convention & Visitors Commission.

Visit Bloomington is the sole community organization with the responsibility of promoting this industry and encouraging its technical assistance, guidance and coordination for the many local business and organization stakeholders in the tourism industry. The administration of Visit Bloomington operations is vested in the Board of Directors. The Board is comprised of representatives from the local hospitality industry and civic areas of the community. Visit Bloomington staff, managed by the Executive Director, implements the programs and policies of the Board.

PLAN PURPOSE

Visit Bloomington's 2023-2025 Destination Strategic Plan is the fourth plan produced utilizing this professionally facilitated three-year formatted model. This version was created after working with a strategic planning consultant and receiving input from 100+ stakeholders in 2022-2023.

This plan's purpose is to provide Visit Bloomington with guidance needed to effectively lead the destination's tourism industry in producing successful marketing efforts, maximizing resources and supporting responsible facility developments with the overall goal of creating long-term sustainable tourism growth for the market.





SITUATION ANALYSIS

The Covid-19 pandemic started soon after the 2020-2022 strategic plan was adopted. The area tourism industry suffered revenue losses of more than 40% and 2,000 jobs went away in 2020.

Pandemic recovery began in late 2021 with Monroe County tourism rebounding well due to being a safe, small college town destination with an abundance of outdoor space. Strong recovery continued into 2022 and it was a record year for visitation and tourism revenues in the market.

The Monroe County area is growing in popularity as a destination due to our many college town amenities, sports related travel, special events, outdoor recreation assets, culinary offerings, arts attractions, and for being safe, affordable, and overall, an easy place to visit.

We remain a busy weekend destination with room to grow visitation beginning Sunday evenings through Thursdays. Bloomington is a popular small destination in Indiana for conferences, meetings and other business travel but we continue to lose mid-week opportunities due to lack of group space. Expansion of the Monroe Convention Center remains on hold after the pandemic.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

2020-2022 Accomplishments

1. Visit Bloomington adapted our priorities and marketing efforts during the pandemic to support safety measures for community members and visitors while responsibly marketing safe tourism.
2. Implemented a safety plan for operations during the pandemic, retained all staff members, stayed under budget, restored reserve funds by end of 2022, and had annual financial audit performed by independent auditors, Blue & Company.
3. Sports travel was an early pandemic rebounder. We cautiously continued our sports marketing efforts through 2020-2021 and generated 23 new sporting event leads and 21 bookings in 2022.
4. Business travel was slower to rebound from the pandemic. We cautiously brought back our meetings marketing efforts in 2021 and generated 43 new meetings leads and 21 bookings in 2022.
5. Chicago (1), Evansville (2), Louisville (3), Terre Haute (4), New York (5), Washington DC (6), Cincinnati (7), South Bend (8), and Fort Wayne (9) were the top visitor origin markets as far as relationship between website traffic, destination visitation, and visitor spending in 2022.
6. Website traffic grew by 60% from 2020-2022 topping over one million user sessions in 2022.
7. Decreased website bounce rate by 6% and increased time on site by 0:22 from 2020-2022.
8. Generated 106 media stories mentioning Bloomington/Monroe County in 2022 and over 200 total 2020-2022.
9. Won Indiana Tourism Association awards for best visitor guide, best leisure travel marketing campaign and best digital marketing campaign 2020-2022.

Challenges *(ranked using stakeholder input)*

1. Promoting a safe and high-quality destination.
2. Growing brand awareness of Bloomington and Monroe County as a weekday travel destination.
3. Recruiting new convention and meetings business.
4. Attracting and retaining a talented workforce as the tourism industry is still recovering from the pandemic and facing labor and supply issues.
5. Promoting responsible growth and sustainability of the area's tourism industry.
6. Completing the Monroe Convention Center expansion.
7. Fostering equity, diversity, and inclusion in the area tourism industry.



DESTINATION BRAND EXPERIENCE

Heritage

NATURE: *The Outdoors*

Bloomington's nature, or its inherent features, are its lakes, limestone, hills, farms, trees, and trails.

NURTURE: *Indiana University*

The university's presence in Bloomington leads to brand offerings like museums, concerts, academic talks, sports, and progressive politics.

Personality

PROGRESSIVE

ACADEMIC

ACCEPTING

ELEVATED

HIP

Offering

Nature

Culture

Sport

Bloomington and Monroe County deliver quality experiences to visitors through unique combinations of cultural, sports and natural offerings. From academic nurturing at Indiana University, arts in hip downtown Bloomington or the gorgeous, natural resources of the Hoosier National Forest, they are all set in a community and area with a progressive and accepting focus.





VISIT BLOOMINGTON

OUR MISSION FOCUS		
Help Drive New Visitor Demand	Help Strengthen the Visitor Experience	Be A Valuable Community Organization

Organization Mission - promote Monroe County destination experiences to potential travelers resulting in increased visitation, positive economic impact, and improved quality of life for the area.

Visitor Promise - provide engaging on-demand information and advice on destination brand experiences.

Partner Promise - lead and collaborate with the tourism industry and community facilitating opportunities in business and product development, education, and advocacy.

ORGANIZATION VALUES	TARGET MARKET SEGMENTS	MISSION FILTER TESTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accountable Creative Driven Innovative Partner-based Passionate Strategic Team-oriented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meetings/business travel Sports travel Events/festival attendees Music, arts, and culture fans Food/culinary tourists Outdoor recreation enthusiasts IU students, family and alumni Talent and retirement recruitment LGBTQIA+ travel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outcome increases visitor spending Emphasis on mid-week overnight stays Impact good for the community Outcome fosters inclusion

2023-2025 STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Listed below are five broad initiatives, with corresponding goals and metrics, to ensure Bloomington's growth as a tourist destination throughout 2023-2025.

Enhance brand awareness for Bloomington and Monroe County as a Travel Destination

1. Utilize more video in marketing efforts.
2. Focus on quality of digital content, all creative and collateral.
3. Increase promotion of the local art scene, particularly the music industry and the culinary arts.
4. Improve visitbloomington.com traffic by lowering bounce rate and growing time spent on site annually.
5. Continue successful travel media efforts.
6. Revive the annual event development grant program beginning in 2022.
7. Increase meetings advertising efforts.

Increase Sales Conversions of Groups and Leisure Visitors Coming to Bloomington and Monroe County

1. Generate 24 meeting event leads and 12 bookings annually.
2. Generate 24 sporting event leads and 12 bookings annually.

Support Product Development of Tourism Attractions, Group Spaces, and Activities in Bloomington and Monroe County

1. Support development of arts-related infrastructure, including music venues and public art.
2. Advocate for and promote a high-quality and safe tourist destination.
3. Support Monroe Convention Center expansion process.
4. Support development or expansion of sports facilities that can attract championship level youth sporting events.
5. Help lead the community's 2024 Solar Eclipse event activities.





Ensure Visit Bloomington's Financial and Administrative Effectiveness

1. Continue to follow the long-established financial checks and balances procedures and maintain transparency by having an outside annual financial audit performed.
2. Invest in professional development training and opportunities for staff.

Engage Community Audiences on the Importance of the Tourism Industry in Bloomington and Monroe County

1. Complete staff wide equity, diversity, and inclusion training.
2. Work with staff to create an equity, diversity, and inclusion plan as it relates to Visit Bloomington marketing efforts and leadership.
3. Send out quarterly partner newsletter.
4. Increase outreach to the Indiana University population.
5. Produce annual community tourism report.

CONCLUSION

This plan can be adapted at any time due to the rapidly changing tourism industry and Monroe County's evolution as a destination. Visit Bloomington will involve and keep participating stakeholders and area tourism industry partners aware of any plan changes.

It's our road map for a strong tourism industry in the future that can benefit the entire Monroe County community.

Please contact Visit Bloomington's Mike McAfee at mike@visitbloomington.com with any questions or comments.

