



NKY TOURISM MASTER PLAN

2022

Message from meetNKY President/CEO



Dear Stakeholders and Partners,

Without a doubt COVID taught us many lessons on being prepared for extreme events, the aftermath and becoming comfortable with pivoting during a time of crisis.

As Northern Kentucky's tourism industry emerges from the worst downturn in our industry, we have begun to realize that some demand is not going to return to the travel landscape. US Travel has finally released data that shows up to 10% of business travel and 10% of group-based travel demand may not return in the United States. This is an outcome of COVID but also the great flex in business. While we hope US Travel and Oxford Economics are wrong, we also need to plan forward to keep travel demand strong in Northern Kentucky.

For the last six months, meetNKY has been working with Streetsense, a national consulting agency, on conducting a destination assessment of tourism assets and demand. They have worked diligently with both public and private partners on determining a slate of projects that will ensure this destination maintains a growth focus that generates strong returns and supports job growth. The plan is aggressive but achievable and aligned with our growth partners in the region. Our organization will own most of the projects but also function as a convener on several.

Our organization is proud to present this plan that has been adopted by our board and will set a course for the tourism industry's "Master Plan" to continue to grow our organization's impact and the destination success.

All my kind regards, in the spirit of hospitality,



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ABOUT



For more than 40 years, the Northern Kentucky CVB has supplied outstanding meeting and convention services, and comprehensive travel information for business and leisure visitors to the Cincinnati and NKY area. In 1974, the Kentucky Legislature approved legislation allowing Boone, Campbell, and Kenton counties to form the Bureau, which initially was called the Northern Kentucky Tourist, Recreation & Convention Commission and is now called meetNKY.

Today our mission is to drive quality of life and economic growth for Northern Kentucky through tourism marketing

The Planning Team would also like to thank the following individuals for participating as key stakeholders throughout the planning process:

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Executive Summary



Executive Summary



Introduction

The 2022 Tourism Master Plan for meetNKY | Northern Kentucky Convention and Visitors Bureau reflects a consensus-driven effort to identify projects and investments that drive quality of life and economic growth for Northern Kentucky through tourism marketing and destination development.

In January 2022, meetNKY engaged Streetsense to develop a Tourism Master Plan for the organization. Streetsense started by conducting a Diagnostic of the region's tourism assets as part of a comprehensive effort to establish quantitative baseline market information and qualitative stakeholder feedback and input. Together, these analyses resulted in a set of project recommendations that will inform staffing and resource allocation, and find partners and champions with whom meetNKY can work towards shared outcomes and goals.

The Tourism Master Plan began with a Diagnostic that took into consideration both **supply** (what is drawing visitors to the market and supporting longer stays?) and **demand** (who is visiting and what are their needs and lifestyle preferences?) through an assessment of assets, including available lodging, attractions, retail and food offerings, and travel/transportation resources, as well as market and visitor characteristics. The Diagnostic uncovered opportunities to improve the visitor experience through “easy wins” while also highlighting opportunities to invest in and improve under-the-radar assets.

It should also be noted that this plan was developed in the long shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly affected the tourism industry both nationally and internationally. The impacts of COVID-19 on the tourism sector have upended the business-as-usual approach to driving visitation. 63% of experts from the World Tourism Organization believe the sector won't fully recover until 2024, and inflation and high fuel prices have further dampened some projections for growth. However, the reliance and high percentage of local visitors from a 1- to 3-hour drive signal opportunities to further reinforce Northern Kentucky as a great weekend and day trip destination.

Key Findings

The Diagnostic found several key differentiators that helped inform the guiding principles and projects identified in this Plan. Notably, this included a strong and compelling story rooted in the region's unique culture and heritage, as well as activities that drive visitation from growing and new customer segments, both in the outdoor recreation realm and in leisure and competitive sports. Together, these enhancements serve the primary goal of the Master Plan, to reinforce Northern Kentucky as a wonderful place to both visit AND live. The Diagnostic led to the following key findings:



Opportunities to grow visitor demand by:

- Leaning into the unique story that only Northern Kentucky and the Greater Cincinnati region can tell, including the opportunity to **grow the visitor base** and attract additional visitation from four target customer segments, 1) Millennial and Gen X Visitors, 2) Gen X married couples and families, 3) outdoor recreationists and sports enthusiast, and 4) African American Culture and Heritage Travelers.
- Embracing the **brand ambassadors in our backyard**. Over 80% of residents are engaged in helping visiting friends and family plan their trip to Northern Kentucky. Residents are powerful influencers in helping visitors plan their itineraries.
- Acknowledging the **near-universal adoption of social media, online search engines, and online reviews** as the dominant form of trip planning. This includes building upon the new ways in which visitors make their travel decisions and embracing the residents who are the region's most effective ambassadors, who also indicate that online portals and resources are among the first places they go when making travel decisions.



Opportunities to improve the supply of assets and amenities by:

- Investing in targeted capital **improvements to visitor assets**, with a focus on the top 25 most reviewed visitor attractions and key under-the-radar assets that align with growth opportunities for new visitor segments. A crowd-sourced analysis of ratings and reviews found that assets with ratings of 4.5 or less generally raised concerns about maintenance, quality, service & hospitality.
- **Lengthening the average overnight stay from 1.5–2 days to 3 days by improving connectivity between and increasing the awareness of existing assets and amenities**. This includes elevating the strong culinary offerings that contribute to the region's bourbon/prohibition history and building synergies between different offerings (e.g., professional sports and outdoor recreation, faith-based attractions, and family-friendly cultural/heritage attractions) that together drive longer stays.
- **Overcoming the challenges of cross-jurisdictional collaboration** by fostering greater communication and information-sharing across state, county and city lines.

Our Approach



Methodology



The Diagnostic focused on understanding both the market and local context and conducting qualitative assessments to evaluate the potential of the region to grow the visitor economy. In evaluating the potential to grow the visitor economy, a gap assessment was conducted that offered insight into how well the supply of assets and offerings meet visitor demand. A set of research questions guided our analysis as follows:

Supply

1. What tourism-supporting assets currently exist within the region, and what is their current condition?
2. How are existing assets rated and reviewed by visitors on popular online platforms, and what is the general level of awareness of these assets?

Demand

1. What are the characteristics of the potential visitor to the region?
2. What do today's visitors want and need? What are their preferences when they travel?
3. What other competing destinations are better positioned to meet their needs rather than this region?

Gap Assessment

1. How well do the offerings and assets meet or exceed the expectations of visitors?
2. The gap assessment then supplied a framework for identifying a short list of meaningful investments in tourism-supporting assets that are necessary to improve the visitor's experience. Projects were selected and assessed against the following criteria:
 - Ability to result in tangible physical improvements to unique assets.
 - Ability to address fundamental organizational, operational, and financial obstacles.
 - Ability to raise awareness of offerings and drive visitation.
 - Complexity and risk within reason.
 - Alignment with guiding principles.

Planning Process

The Destination Planning effort occurred in three parts as outlined below.

Part 1: Site Visit & Outreach

Streetsense began by reviewing any precedent community plans, economic development strategies, economic impact studies, visitor profile studies, and industry reports that helped us to form an understanding of historic visitor economy performance and glean any critical insight into issues and concerns that have been raised in the past.

The team explored the region during a 4-day long itinerary which included in-person stakeholder engagement activities (1-on-1 interviews, focus groups by areas of interest, and guided tours with local key tourism/hospitality leaders.)

Additionally, a survey was sent to Northern Kentucky residents to better understand their perceptions of the region and its tourism assets.

Part 2: Diagnostic

Streetsense utilized the Commercial DNA (C-DNA) framework that looks at four areas of analysis: Physical Environment Assessment, Business Assessment, Market Analysis, and Administrative Capacity.

Market Analysis

The market analysis included three main components. The team first looked at global and regional tourism trends to uncover major themes and opportunities for tourism growth, utilizing existing secondary and primary data sources. The second component of the market analysis included a customer segmentation analysis by age cohort. This was used to identify nuances in consumer tastes and preferences by stage of life. To further investigate local trends, we supplemented this analysis with a “deep dive” into the specific thematic drivers of tourism that consider subsegments of tourism visitation.

Physical Environment Assessment

The analysis of the physical environment covers a physical assessment of the tourism assets in the region, including the quality of the public and private realms, and an assessment of accessibility and mobility infrastructure in the region. This involved considering how visitors arrive in the region and how they move around upon arrival.

During our site visit, we took time to walk the streets, drive around, visit local assets and attractions, and spend time in public places to assess both visual and physical connectivity. Additionally, geospatial assessments and mapping exercises are used to understand the relation between accessibility and adjacent or neighboring “destinations.”

Business Environment Assessment

Streetsense conducted an audit of Northern Kentucky’s business, natural, and cultural assets. Significant effort went into cleaning, classifying, and merging data inputs to supply meaningful insight into the mix and quality of offerings. The assessment included finding clusters of businesses, including food establishments, entertainment venues, commercial districts, and accommodations. The team then conducted an audit of each major asset against popular online review sites, including Google, TripAdvisor, and Hotels.com.

Gap Analysis

The market, physical and business environment assessment concluded with a gap analysis to evaluate the extent to which the region's tourism-supporting assets and offerings were meeting the needs and serving the tastes and preferences of the customer segments identified in the market analysis.

Administrative Capacity

Following the gap analysis, the report assessed at a macro-level the community's capacity for project implementation. This included an assessment of governance, partnerships, and potential resources. Much of this assessment included conversations with local government officials, stakeholder groups, community & cultural associations, and businesses. These interviews were conducted during our site visit as well as through a series of ongoing interviews and meetings.

Part 3: Project Recommendations

After completing the assessment and gap analysis, Streetsense presented the Diagnostic findings to the meetNKY Board of Directors and Advisory Committee. A workshop discussion was also held with the Advisory Committee to generate ideas and responses to the assessment findings. Committee members were asked to generate specific and actionable project recommendations, which corresponded directly to the findings from the gap analysis.

The Destination Plan concludes with a list of short-term, medium-term, and long-term projects that reflect feedback from the Board, the Advisory Committee as well as an alignment with consumer and market demand findings.

Overview of Diagnostic Findings



Overview

The region offers a highly diverse set of offerings for families, including faith-based destinations, outdoor recreation activities (baseball, disc golf, and major league arenas), and walkable urban environments. The bourbon trail, distilleries, and wineries further round out a set of diverse assets distributed throughout the Northern Kentucky region, with a strong concentration along the Ohio River near Cincinnati.

Additionally, the Ohio River and Licking Rivers are part of a powerful narrative that has both divided and connected this region for over two hundred years. Walkability between assets along the river, notability between Covington and Newport, as well as overall navigability between assets throughout the region, remain obstacles to overcome.

This section summarizes the diagnostic assessment of offerings that drive visitation within the region and offers an overview of findings that inform the final selection of project recommendations in the Master Plan.



Northern Kentucky has historically drawn visitors from both local and regional markets, with two thirds of visitors (66%) to the region coming for the day (2020). The number of day trip visitors to the region has increased steadily since 2018. The pandemic, as well as the higher cost of flights in the post-pandemic era, have only served to further incentivize these daily visitors.

Market research identified four key visitor segments that offer opportunities for clearer targeting. In some cases, these segments further reinforce existing visitation patterns, and in others, reflect untapped opportunities to gain experience market share. These target visitor segments include:

Educated Gen Z/Millennial and Gen X visitors traveling with friends and partners collectively



comprise 82% overnight visitors. These visitors are well educated (66.7% are college graduates) and are traveling from Louisville, Cleveland, Indianapolis, and Lexington - the top four origin markets for this cohort. If traveling by plane, these two key market segments are also coming from origin markets that include New York and Chicago (both within 3-hour direct flight time).

There are also clear opportunities to uncork the growth from two additional visitor segments that



are underrepresented compared to their potential market share, including **African American cultural visitors** and **outdoor recreationists**. The existence of under-the-radar cultural and natural assets, as well as the opportunity to tell a compelling and authentic story, is a natural segue to grow both visitor segments. Targeted investments that take advantage of existing natural assets like the Ohio and Licking Rivers, hiking trails, as well as a growing disc golf movement offer enhancements not only to the visitor experience but also to the effort to attract new residents to the region – a powerful economic development tool and a part of meetNKY’s stated mission. Additionally, opportunities to link the story of the Underground Railroad trail through Northern Kentucky, with culmination at the National Underground Freedom Center, are low-hanging fruit that further capitalize on the region’s unique place in history and world-class cultural assets.



Supply

Highly rated visitor attractions that drive three core audiences to the region

The region has a variety of assets that primarily cater to three core audiences:

1. Families
2. Sports spectators and outdoor enthusiasts
3. Culture & heritage travelers

The top three highly rated attractions (Source: Google) at this time are family-oriented, including the Ark Encounter, the Cincinnati Zoo, and the Newport Aquarium, ranked 1st, 2nd, and 3rd in several reviews.

Other assets were not highly reviewed, but highly rated, suggesting under-the-radar assets that might benefit from improved awareness, including Devou Park, the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center (while located in Cincinnati, it sits at the landing of the Roebling Suspension Bridge, and is a powerful symbol of the Underground Railroad journey whose final stop was Northern Kentucky) and the Roebling Suspension Bridge itself.

Top 25 Highly-Rated Attractions/Assets

(Source: Google)

NAME	PRIMARY CATEGORY	PRIMARY AUDIENCE	TOTAL NO. OF REVIEWS	AVERAGE REVIEW
Ark Encounter - Life-size Noah's Ark	Arts, Culture & Heritage	Families	24,177	4.7
Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens	Arts, Culture & Heritage	Families	21,457	4.6
Newport Aquarium	Arts, Culture & Heritage	Families	13,999	4.5
Newport on the Levee	Commercial	Families	13,873	4.4
Great American Ballpark	Sports	Sports Spectators	12,806	4.7
Creation Museum	Arts, Culture & Heritage	Families	9,340	4.5
Hard Rock Casino	Arts & Entertainment	Gen X, Boomers	9,336	3.9
Paul Brown Stadium	Sports	Sports Spectators	5,750	4.4
Cincinnati Museum Center	Arts, Culture & Heritage	Culture & heritage travelers	5,632	4.6
Cincinnati Art Museum	Arts, Culture & Heritage	Culture & heritage travelers	4,819	4.8
Aronoff Center for the Arts	Arts & Entertainment	Gen X, Boomers	3,188	4.8
National Underground Railroad Freedom Center	Arts, Culture & Heritage	Culture & heritage travelers	2,409	4.7
Devou Park	Outdoor Recreation	Families	2,310	4.7
Big Bone Lick State Historic Site	Outdoor Recreation	Outdoor recreation enthusiasts	2,136	4.5
Cincinnati Music Hall	Arts & Entertainment	Culture & heritage travelers	2,009	4.8
John A. Roebling Suspension Bridge	Arts, Culture & Heritage	Culture & heritage travelers	1,830	4.7
American Sign Museum	Arts, Culture & Heritage	Culture & heritage travelers	1,683	4.7
BB Riverboats	Arts, Culture & Heritage	Gen X, Boomers	1,578	4.4
BB&T Arena	Sports	Sports Spectators	1,184	4.4
Kentucky Speedway	Sports	Sports Spectators	911	4.6
Florence Y'all's	Sports	Sports Spectators	803	4.5
Turfway Park	Sports	Sports Spectators	759	4.2
Boone County Arboretum	Outdoor Recreation	Gen X, Boomers	655	4.7
A. J. Jolly Park and Campground	Outdoor Recreation	Families, Outdoor recreation enthusiasts	642	4.5
Florence Speedway	Sports	Sports Spectators	626	4.7

Opportunities to increase visitor dwell time and improve the visitor experience through the inclusion of tertiary assets

Tertiary assets play a critical role in extending visitor dwell time and enhancing the overall visitor experience. In Northern Kentucky, these assets include shopping, eating, drinking, outdoor recreation, and attending sporting and music/cultural events.

While the region's existing assets are a strong starting point for itinerary building, tertiary assets are critical to increasing dwell time and encouraging return day trips for target market segments.



PRIMARY REGIONAL ATTRACTIONS Baseline: 1.5 - 2 Day visit	SECONDARY ATTRACTIONS Add: .5 - 1 day with a visit to a secondary attraction	TERTIARY ASSETS Add .5 - 1 day with added tertiary assets
Ark Encounter	Creation Museum	Distilleries
Newport on the Levee	Hard Rock Casino	Breweries
Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Gardens	Paul Brown Stadium	Wineries
Newport Aquarium	Cincinnati Museum Center	Live Music and Entertainment Venues
Great American Ball Park	Cincinnati Art Museum	Golf Courses
	Aronoff Center for the Arts	Disc Golf Courses
	National Underground Railroad Freedom Center	Natural Trails - biking, hiking, water recreation
	Devou Park	
	Big Bone Lick State Historic Site	
	Cincinnati Music Hall	
	John A. Roebling Suspension Bridge	
	American Sign Museum	
	BB Riverboats	
	BB&T Arena	
	Kentucky Speedway	
	Florence Y'all's	
	Turfway Park	
	Boone County Arboretum	
	AJ Jolly Park and Campground	

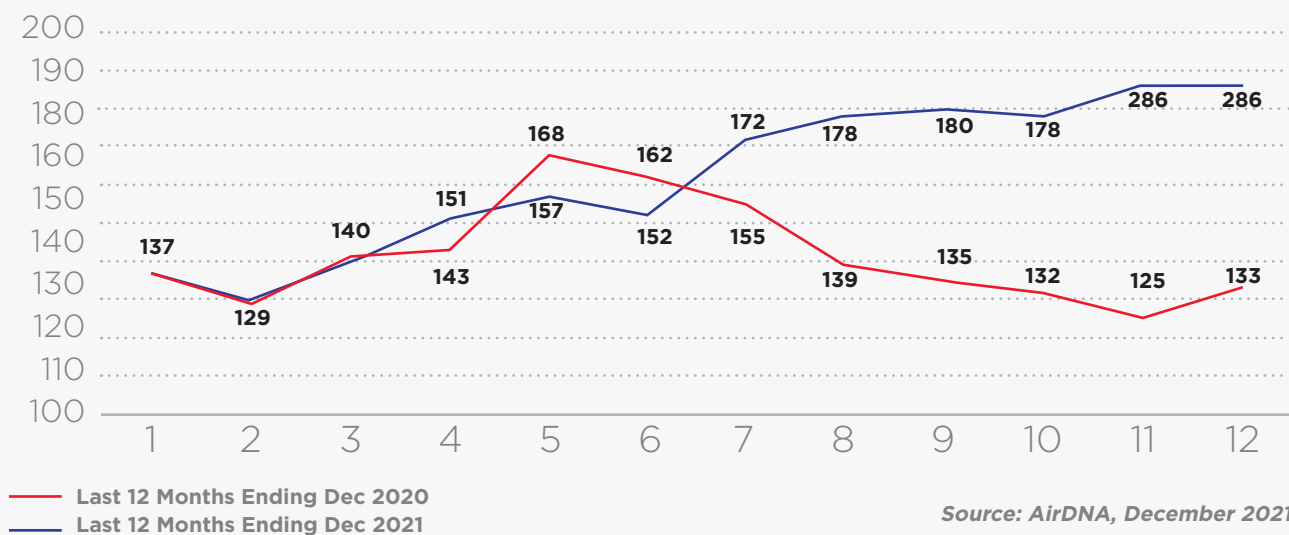
Diverse lodging options support growth in overnight stays

The bulk of mass-market lodging can be found in Florence, where chain hotels meet the robust demand generated by the Creation Museum and the Ark Encounter. In Covington and Newport, smaller boutique hotels are growing their market share, including the Hotel Covington expansion. And while short-term rentals like Airbnb constitute 5% of available listings, they are becoming more popular, particularly in and around Arc Encounter. AirDNA data shows

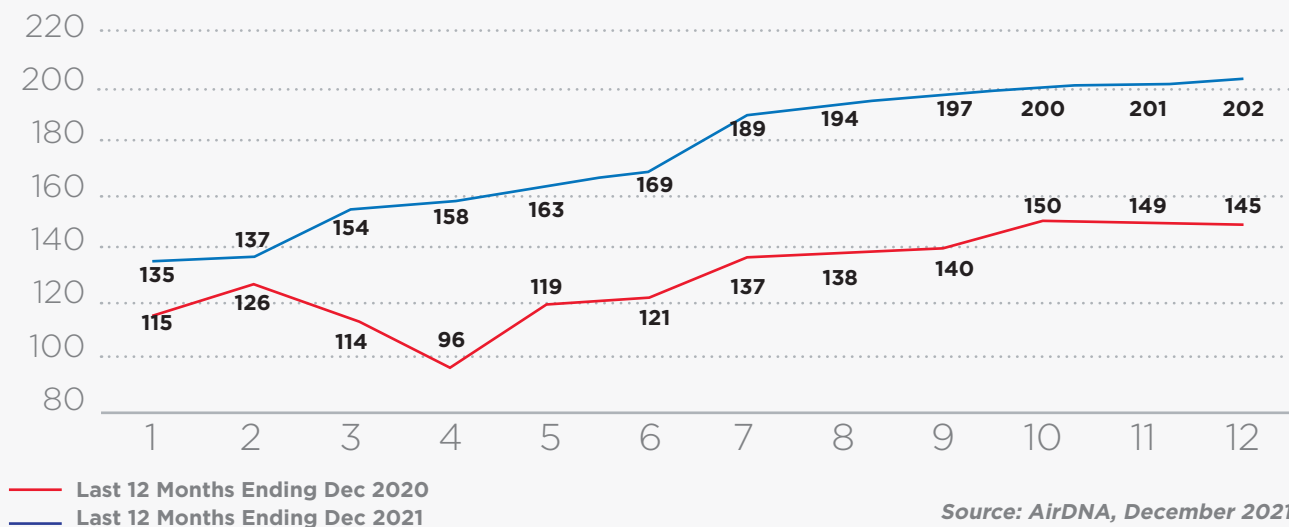
an increase in both the number of listings and the average daily rates for Airbnb rentals.

Unfortunately, despite the return of regional indoor sporting events, the large-scale convention segment remains uncertain, and demand generators like the Ark Encounter are increasingly planning for on-site hotel growth that may affect room occupancy in Boone, Kenton and Campbell Counties.

Short term rental listings are growing in the region



Average daily rates for short term rentals continue to increase annually





Map of Popular F&B Establishments
Source: Zartico

A strong Food & Beverage (F&B) cluster that can be further strengthened and connected to visitor assets

Food and Beverage assets include distilleries, wineries, and culinary fare that reflect the region's culture, history, and Southern branding. Most of the unique F&B offerings are found within .5 miles of the riverfront and many operators feature indoor and outdoor spaces that could be leveraged for ambient entertainment and music, further in keeping with the region's identity and musical connections. Additionally, residents highlight the availability of local craft beverages as one of the top three differentiators in the region.

A strong network of partners supporting NKY tourism

meetNKY has long taken part in and supported partnerships and relationships with Cincinnati partners. Today, meetNKY and Cincinnati USA function as a 'super bureau' under an MOU with a shared vision for leisure tourism and a shared marketing strategy. Additionally, a robust network of asset operations, individual suppliers, and vendors are engaged with meetNKY as partners and supporters.

Despite these successes, the ongoing complexity of cross-state and cross-jurisdiction coordination and lack of ownership from either state have led to limited joint support, funding, and resources. Overcoming the labyrinth of players and working together will mean further investment in the DMO's role as convener, supporting opportunities for communication and the intentional sharing of ideas and resources.

Demand

Who is visiting and what are their needs and lifestyle preferences?

Marketing the Northern Kentucky and Cincinnati Region

When Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky are viewed together as a region, the area is replete with a diverse set of offerings on both sides of the Ohio River that provide opportunities to extend dwell time and grow visitation, especially among day trip visitors who make up 66% of the total person trips to the region (*Source: Longwoods International, 2020*).

Additionally, it should be noted that 40% of day trip visitors are visiting friends and relatives (higher than the national average of 36%), who play an

outsized role in determining how their time and resources are spent. A resident sentiment survey issued by meetNKY in 2022 found that **over 80% of residents help plan the trips of friends and families**, with most residents making recommendations through a mixture of word-of-mouth and online tools (i.e., search engines, social media, and online reviews).

Current visitor segments and potential segments to grow

The pandemic served to further accelerate the growth in the 1- to 3-day visitor trip to friends and family (within a 2-3-hour drive). Looking ahead, the growth in international visitors will likely depend on carrier expansions, which meetNKY continues advocacy efforts.

DAYTRIP VISITORS

Day trip visitors are a critical element of the visitor economy. In 2020, of the 12 million total person-trips to the region, a plurality of 66%, or 8.5 million, were Day Person Trips. The top origin market for day trip visitors includes Cincinnati, Louisville, Lexington, and Indianapolis, all within a 1.5 hour to 3+ hour drive of the region.

*Map of Northern Kentucky/Cincy Region **daytrip visitors'** origin markets*
(*Source: Longwoods International 2019*)

Outdoor Recreationists & Sports Enthusiasts

Outdoor recreation trends suggest growth opportunities. Outdoor recreation has also changed because of the pandemic. Nearly half of adults from across the United States now participate in outdoor recreation on at least a monthly basis, and approximately 20% are new to outdoor recreation during the pandemic. (Source: Penn State's Department of Recreation, Park, and Tourism Management). In 2020, 6% of day-trip visitors to the region came primarily for outdoor activities, which is less than the U.S. norm of 10%, suggesting opportunities to right-size this segment, particularly because nearly 35% of resident survey respondents indicated that "outdoor recreation" was what they enjoyed doing most with visiting, friends and family.

Of the top ten 2020 activities and experiences for day-person trips in the Northern Kentucky region, hiking, backpacking, swimming, and fishing made the top 6th, 7th, and 8th spots, respectively. (Source: Longwoods International.)

Outdoor recreation is a family-friendly activity.

Households with children ages 6 to 12 had the highest overall household participation rates —60 percent versus 46 percent for households without children. 64% of outdoor recreation participants in the US are below the age of 44.

Outdoor recreationists are diverse in income and increasingly diverse in ethnic background.

The participation rate among households with incomes under \$25,000 grew 6 percent annually in the last three years. Those earning under \$25,000 are most interested in fishing, hiking, and camping – activities with the lowest barriers to entry. Those earning upwards of \$75,000 are most interested in hiking, working out outdoors, and doing yoga outdoors and are primarily White (72%.) However, over the past three years, participation amongst Hispanic and Black residents increased between 1-4% annually.



African American Culture & Heritage Travelers

Room for growth in an underrepresented market. The spending power of black travelers is approximately \$109.4 billion (*Source: MMGY Global, 2019*), and three-quarters of black travelers intend to take an overnight leisure trip, with many preferring to stay close to home when they do travel.

The disparity between the population of Northern Kentucky's top origin markets and the visitation to the region suggests that targeted efforts need to be made to improve the region's fair market share. In 2020, 91% of 2020-day person trips to the Northern Kentucky River Region were Caucasian (*Source: Longwoods International*). In contrast, the top four markets from which the region draws its visitors are markedly more diverse, suggesting untapped opportunities for growth in market share from Black and Latino visitors, who are also more likely to stay close to home when planning for overnight leisure trips.

Additionally, Black travelers are influenced by concerns about safety as well as representation in marketing. They pay close attention to how destinations and travel service providers approach diversity, with 54% suggesting that representation in marketing and advertising collateral plays a key role in their decision-making. (*Source: MMGY Global, 2021*)

Interest in cultural attractions related to race and heritage. Black travelers are highly interested in cultural attractions related to their race and heritage. In the Northern Kentucky and Cincinnati market, this includes destinations such as National Underground Railroad Freedom Center and the Muhammad Ali Center in Louisville.

Black travelers also ranked "food that reminds them of home" as the top culinary option they are interested in and showed less interest in distillery or brewery tours.

NKY Day Trip Visitors vs. Population in Top Origin Markets

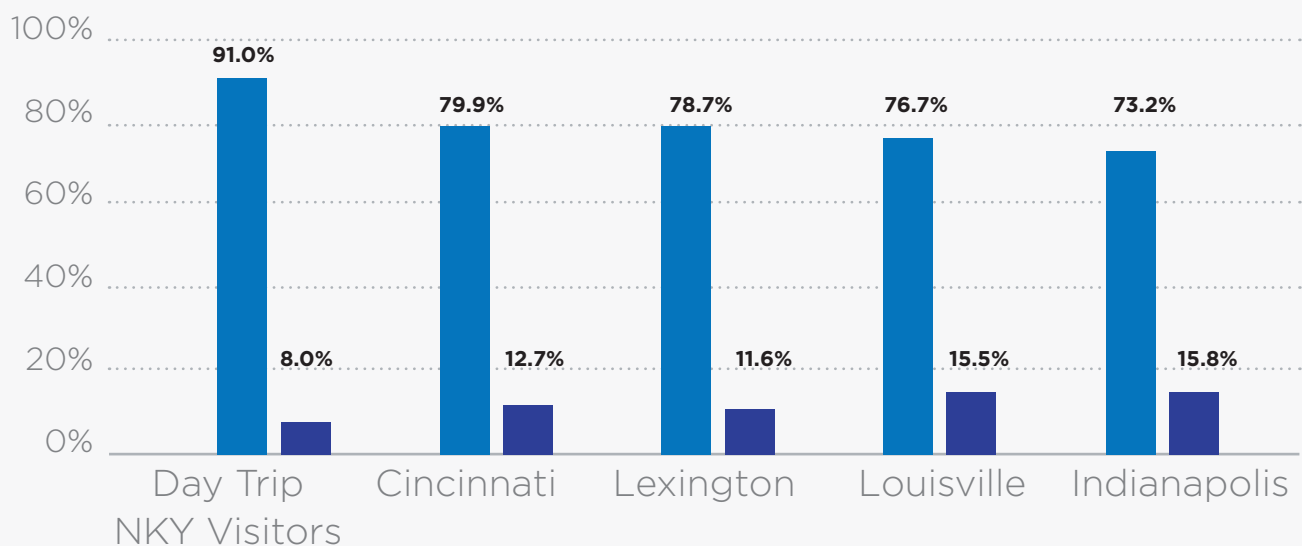


Figure 1:
Source: Longwoods International, ESRI Demographics and Income Profiles

■ White Alone
■ Black Alone

Recommendations



Overview



The recommendations outlined here are highly focused on improving and supporting economic growth for Northern Kentucky through tourism marketing and destination development. Additionally, they build upon a storyline and set of assets that are unique to Kentucky – its regional offerings that emphasize food, beverage, and family-oriented fun, while drawing upon untapped opportunities to grow market share among outdoor recreationists – both local and visitors – as well as a more diverse visitor segment whose interests include the stories of the Underground Railroad and African-American experience in the region.

The plan recommendations outlined here are aimed at achieving the following objectives:

1. Growth in overall visitation
2. Growth in sales for the business and ticket sales for visitor attractions
3. Improvement in assets and offerings that enhance the quality of the visitor experience and improve the quality of life for existing and new residents

Looking ahead, the meetNKY Tourism Master Plan seeks to showcase Northern Kentucky's diverse assets and stories while working together as a region. We seek to find ways to prolong stays from those who live within 1-3 hours away and fully embrace the power of locals and local businesses as both partners and brand ambassadors. We do this through the following recommendations outlined here.

Recommendations

The strategies outlined in this plan reflect four guiding principles that align with meetNKY's mission and vision. These are as follows:

GUIDING PRINCIPLES



ADVOCACY AND INDUSTRY RELATIONS

Embrace the Destination Management Organization as the intermediary and convener



COMMUNITY EDUCATION:

Engage locals and train industry partners in hospitality excellence



BRANDING & STORYTELLING:

Tell the unique story of Northern Kentucky history and assets





INVESTMENTS IN PLACE AND ASSETS:

Target Investments in place-based assets that improve accessibility and are aligned with Northern Kentucky's unique value proposition

GUIDING PRINCIPLE	STRATEGY
Advocacy and Industry Relations: Embrace the DMOs role as an intermediary and convener	1. Cross-Jurisdictional Collaboration
	2. Trend Reporting
Branding & Storytelling: Tell the unique story of Northern Kentucky history and assets	3. Regional Branding
	4. African American Cultural Heritage Campaign
	5. Outdoor Recreation Campaign
Community Education: Engage locals and train industry partners in hospitality excellence	6. Educate Locals
	7. Digital Marketing & Online Training for Operators
	8. Educate Hospitality Workers
Investments in Place and Assets: Target Investments in place-based assets that improve overall accessibility and are aligned with Northern Kentucky's unique value proposition	9. Capital Improvement Grant Program
	10. Walkability in Downtowns & Tri-City Streetscape
	11. Targeted Investments in Outdoor Infrastructure <i>Riverfront Commons Trail</i> <i>Ovation Park Kayak Launch</i> <i>Licking River Blue Water Trail</i>
	12. Bridge Placemaking
	13. Improved Regional & Riverfront Connectivity

1 Cross-Jurisdictional Collaboration

Location	Entire Region
Origin	Tourism Master Plan Advisory Committee
Budget	 Low Budget (Under \$50k)
Timeframe	 Short Term (Less than 5 years)
Sources of Funding	Funding needs would depend on projects the new collaboration group identifies and pursues
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased collaboration among organizations • Increased awareness among community members • Increased funding and completion of large regional projects
Project Description	<p>The tangled web of partners within the variety of jurisdictions that make up the Greater Cincinnati region have an opportunity to improve collaboration, share resources, and drive visitation more effectively as a collective. meetNKY has a great opportunity to be the conduit that bring them all together through regular convenings, project implementation, the pursuit of funding for collaborative efforts, and the formation of committees around targeted strategies outlined in this plan.</p>
Diagnostic	<p>Cross-jurisdiction collaboration aligns local policy and program goals and positions the region better competitively. This is especially true when looking at the infrastructure, education, and revitalization challenges facing many US regions as they deal with global competition.</p>
Action Item	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify key partners & stakeholders • Create timetable & schedule for meetings • Define and establish goals/objectives • Identify key projects and initiatives for group • Identify funding (if needed)

Cross-Jurisdictional Collaboration (Con't.)

Partners

- Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce
- Cincinnati USA Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Northern Kentucky Tri-Ed Economic Development
- Cincinnati Northern Kentucky International Airport
- Cincinnati Regional Chamber of Commerce
- Kentucky Small Business Center of Covington
- Kenton County Economic Development
- Campbell County Economic Development
- Boone County Economic Development
- Hamilton County, OH Economic Development
- Butler County, OH Economic Development
- Warren County, OH Economic Development
- Clermont County, OH Economic Development
- Cincinnati Community & Economic Development Department

Case Studies

Stronger Together Destination NWA

Source: *Greater Topeka Partnership*



The Greater Topeka Partnership and the Lawrence Chamber of Commerce are partnered to host an inter-city visit to Northwest Arkansas (NWA), a regional collective of Rogers, Springdale, Bentonville and Fayetteville. Titled “Stronger Together: Destination NWA,” the visit allowed community leaders from the public, private, educational and nonprofit sectors from Topeka and Lawrence to gain knowledge about innovative ideas and programs from Northwest Arkansas. The visit also provided an opportunity for interaction among city leaders and facilitated the exchange of best practices and lessons learned between the visiting cities and the destination cities.

Northern Virginia Regional Commission

Source: *Northern Virginia Regional Commission*

The Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC) is a regional council of thirteen-member local governments in the Northern Virginia suburbs of Washington DC. With a rich history spanning 60 years, the commission’s chief roles and functions have focused on providing information, performing professional and technical services for its members, and serving as a mechanism for regional coordination. The work of the Commission is supported by annual contributions from its member local governments, by appropriations of the Virginia General Assembly, and by a variety of grants, contracts and fees from both governmental and private sector sources.

2 Trend Reporting

Location	Entire Region
Origin	Tourism Master Plan Advisory Committee Stakeholder Interviews
Budget	 Low Budget (Under \$50k)
Timeframe	 Short Term (Less than 5 years)
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coverage In various media outlets on the importance of Tourism in the region & trends • More interaction between businesses and meetNKY • Greater interest and support for tourism by key government and regional leaders
Diagnostic	During our stakeholder interviews, many partners expressed the need for the distribution of regular updates on the region's tourism market performance/successes to enable local operators to speak knowledgeably about the region's offerings. These reports also foster and create new opportunities for collaboration across states, counties, and municipalities.
Action Item	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine metrics to be reported • Determine various organizations and partners that will help collect/gather and send information to CVB • Create a system for compiling data from various organizations and partners in addition to the CVB's data • Create designated space on the CVB website and other means for delivering Information to stakeholders, businesses, and residents. • Determine other ways that Information will be released • Create PR Campaigns for the release of Information when appropriate

3 Regional Branding

Location	Entire Region
Origin	Tourism Master Plan Advisory Committee
Budget	 Medium Budget \$50k - \$200k
Timeframe	 Short Term (Less than 5 years)
Sources of Funding	Kentucky Tourism EDA Grant/Kentucky DMO ARPA Grant (Possibly for Brand Research if needed) Explore contributions from each County's Government Economic Fund
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater Awareness of the Destination among Residents and Visitors Increased Press/Media Coverage Increased Tourism Tax Increased Collaboration among Partners and Stakeholders Increased use of messaging by partners
Project Description	Develop a Regional brand for Northern Kentucky that is aligned with partners
Diagnostic	During stakeholder interviews, many expressed the need for the region to have some degree of brand differentiation - one that acknowledges the unique opportunity to embrace the "north meets south" identity of the region.
Action Item	Determine which key stakeholders & partners to collaborate with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage community Conduct research Creation of brand PR campaign to raise awareness regarding the brand
Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce Northern Kentucky Tri-Ed Economic Development Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport Kenton County Government Campbell County Government Boone County Government Team Kentucky-Department of Economic Development Cincinnati USA Convention & Visitors Bureau Kentucky Tourism

Regional Branding (Con't.)

Case Study


Kent County Delaware Tourism Corporation

Source: visitdelawarevillages.com

Kent County Tourism Corporation is the destination marketing organization for Kent County, Delaware and its incorporated cities and towns. In its effort to rebrand the county, Kent County held town hall sessions to secure stakeholder input, leverage online listening technology to understand locale's reputation and conduct a proprietary and projectable panel study of consumers living within a 250-mile radius of the area.

The in-depth audience research revealed three target audience segments whose interests resonated with Kent County's offerings. Informed by consumers, a compelling new brand was developed — Delaware's Quaint Villages — and tagline, "At Your Own Pace". The evolved brand, after being implemented strategically across all communication channels including its new website, has resulted in tracked incremental return on marketing investments of \$18 Million, a return of \$47 for every marketing dollar invested, 19% increase in accommodation tax collections and visitor parties who collectively visited all 20 of its cities, towns and villages in Kent County.

4 African American Cultural Heritage Campaign

Location	Regional
	Some degree of emphasis on the Northern Kentucky and Cincinnati Riverfronts, including Covington, Newport, and the bridge links to Cincinnati
Origin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tourism Master Plan Advisory Committee The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center
Budget	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey, Context and Documentation (\$) – low (<50K) Planning Grants (\$\$) – medium (50K-200K) Marketing Campaign (\$\$) – medium (50K-200K) Capital Investments- (\$\$\$) – high (200K+)
Timeframe	 Short Term (3-5 years)
Sources of Funding	Funding opportunities include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Trust for Historic Preservation African American Cultural Heritage Fund Action Planning Grants (\$50k - \$150k) fund capital projects, organizational capacity building, project planning and interpretation/programming. National Parks Service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Civil Rights Grants funded by the Historic Preservation Fund Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growth in African American visitors to Northern Kentucky An event developed in coordination with the National Underground Freedom Center in alignment with the Tourism Master Plan
Project Description	Establish a campaign that builds upon the unique assets that tell the story of the African American experience in Northern Kentucky and Ohio, focused on the Underground Railroad and in close partnership with the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center.
Diagnostic	<p>The story of the Underground Railroad is one that is deeply rooted in the history of Northern Kentucky and Cincinnati, and the presence of the Underground Railroad Freedom Center – a world-class museum located at the foot of the John H. Roebling Bridge, an iconic bridge that connects Covington and Cincinnati – and a tourism destination in its own right, at the precise location where many slaves crossed to freedom, is a powerful story that is unique to this region.</p> <p>Despite this powerful story that speaks to the African American experience, the Northern Kentucky region does not currently capture its fair share of African American travelers. According to Longwoods International's Kentucky Travel USA Day Report for 2020, 66%, or 8.5 million of the region's 13 million annual visitors are day trippers. Yet even though 12.8% of the population within a two-hour drive are African American, only 8% of Northern Kentucky River Region Visitors are African American, suggesting significant opportunity to grow market share from a rapidly growing customer segment that is highly interested in cultural attractions related to race and heritage.</p>

African American Cultural Heritage Campaign (Con't.)

Action Item

- Outreach and engagement with the African American community
- Survey existing sites and determine whether they have been verified sites with the National Park Service. NPS Verified Sites are potentially eligible for additional funding.
- Work with the Freedom Center and their leadership to conduct outreach to partners in the African American Community, including pastors, alumni groups from schools and any Kentucky or Ohio based African American Studies departments. Conduct outreach to partners in the African American Community, leading with The Freedom Center
- With partners, pursue planning grants to further advance efforts

Partners

- National Underground Railroad Freedom Center
- National Trust for Historic Preservation African American Cultural Action Heritage Fund (Founding Director Brent Leggs is a Kentucky Native and University of Kentucky graduate)
- Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky African American Chamber of Commerce
- General Association of Baptist in Kentucky, an assembly of 525 Black Missionary Baptists Churches



Case Study



African American Heritage Trail

Asheville (NC) African American Trail is a project funded by the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority and led by a local, nonprofit organization, the River Front Development Group. The trail is a compilation of approximately 19 sites that focus on the history and African-American experience in Asheville. It is a physical path that takes visitors through historic African-American neighborhoods in and around downtown Asheville. The project includes significant community engagement through an Advisory Committee that consists of black business owners leaders and influential Black residents.

5 Outdoor Recreation Campaign

Location	Entire Region
Origin	<p>Potential project champions include individuals with the follow organizations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cincinnati Off-Road Alliance (CORA) • Southank Partners • Northern Kentucky Area Development District • Commonwealth of Kentucky • Campbell County • University of Kentucky • Sierra Club - Bike Walk Kentucky
Budget	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing Campaign (brochure, billboard, newsletter, etc.) (\$) (\$) - low (<50K)
Timeframe	 <p>Short Term (Less than 5 years)</p>
Sources of Funding	<p>No sources are formally committed; however, funding opportunities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal ARPA Travel and Tourism Funding - Tourism and Destination Marketing Organizations - Economic Recovery Funding (Total \$5,346,250) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o meetNKY: \$883,155 • Federal ARPA Marketing and Promotion Funds • National Trust for Historic Preservation African American Cultural Heritage Fund Action Planning Grants (\$50k - \$150k) fund capital projects, organizational capacity building, project planning and interpretation/programming. • National Parks Service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Civil Rights Grants funded by the Historic Preservation Fund o Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investments in outdoor recreation assets • Increased usage of outdoor recreation assets and locations
Project Description	Promotion of outdoor recreation offerings for both visitors and residents.

Outdoor Recreation Campaign (Con't.)

Diagnostic

Interest in outdoor recreation grew significantly during the pandemic. Looking ahead, investments in outdoor recreational opportunities align with opportunities to attract active travelers, including Gen X and educated millennials not only as visitors to the region but also as potential residents. Outdoor recreation facilities also play a role in economic development.

Additionally, Kentucky's streams and waterways form one of the nation's largest blue water trail systems. Many of these trails are open to public use and are growing in usage, however there are limited areas where canoeists, kayakers and other water aficionados can gain entry to these waterways.

This recommendation further benefits from the significant interest and commitment of a strong set of stakeholders and partners.

Action Item

- Coordinate a working group to continue to advance investments in outdoor recreation.
- Identify and prioritize targeted investments in outdoor recreation.

Partners

- Northern Kentucky Horse Network
- Campbell County Conservation District
- Queen City Bike
- Campbell County Cooperative Extension Service
- Ohio River Way
- Cincinnati Off-Road Alliance
- Urban Extension Initiative
- Northern Kentucky Area Development District
- Southbank Partners
- ConnectNKY
- Tri-State Trails
- Northern Kentucky Sierra Club Group

Case Studies



Verdun Beach Montreal

Source: [Montreal.ca](https://montreal.ca)

Project Montreal worked with the borough to receive just over \$1 million in funding from Montreal's 375th anniversary celebrations. They also got money from the Quebec government to create Verdun Beach. Verdun Beach is a universally accessible urban beach located on the shore of the Saint Lawrence River and features a concrete path leading down to a swimming area complete with ramp access, slides, climbing wall, hammocks, and sand area. In addition to the supervised beach, Project Montreal plans to open a refreshment stand and cafe. Since Verdun beach opened, the water quality in the river has improved greatly.

6 Educate Locals

Location	Entire Region
Origin	Tourism Master Plan Advisory Committee
Budget	 Depending on program design - \$ Low Budget (Under \$50k)
Timeframe	 Short Term (Less than 5 years) Ongoing
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Media Activity & Website Activity • Local Press Coverage • More participation and Interaction with residents • Positive Reviews on Google, Bing, etc... • Increased Visitor Satisfaction • Increased traffic to attractions
Project Description	Raise awareness of the role of locals as brand ambassadors and grow "visit local" efforts
Diagnostic	According to the meetNKY Resident Sentiment survey, two-thirds of Northern Kentucky residents host friends or family more than twice a year and over 80% help plan those trips. Additionally, 70% indicate that they depend on word-of-mouth to decide on where to bring their visitors. If educated properly, residents are powerful advocates in promoting a destination.
Action Item	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create marketing & campaign materials • Host informational meetings for local groups and community members • Launch media/PR information • Host regional bloggers/media and/or tours for locals of attractions • Create an incentive program or promotion for bigger engagement by residents & groups
Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce • Rotary Clubs • Lions Clubs • Community Groups • County Recreation Programs • Local Media (Radio, TV, Newspaper) • Regional Bloggers

Educate Locals (Con't.)

Case Studies



West Palm Beach Destination Champions Program **Source: thepalmbeaches.com/destination-champions**

West Palm Beach created a Destination Champion program. Destination Champions are community leaders, local business partners, industry experts and thought leaders who share the common goal of promoting The Palm Beaches as a “business ready” meeting destination. The Group Sales and Destination Services Team, work with Destination Champions to showcase the key assets of the county’s targeted industries, to attract meetings and conventions to the destination. This in turn contributes to the greater social and economic impact on The Palm Beaches.

Bucks County PA From the Locals Blog and Podcast **Source: visitbuckscounty.com**

Visit Bucks County PA created a podcast and blog called “From the Locals”. Both series highlight what makes Bucks County unique told from the perspective of local business owners. This series helps to get residents and business owners involved in tourism and helps educate both locals and visitors alike.

7 Digital Marketing & Online Training for Operators

Location	Entire Region
Origin	Tourism Master Plan Advisory Committee Covington, KY Economic Development Director (Google My Business)
Budget	 \$ Low Budget (Under \$50k)
Sources of Funding	Explore sharing the cost among partners
Timeframe	 Short Term (Less than 5 years)
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More participation and interaction with operators • Increased business sales & receipts • Larger presence among Northern Kentucky entities on social media/Internet • Greater awareness of attractions/businesses by residents and visitors • Increased tourism tax
Project Description	Develop a digital marketing training program for tourism asset operators and provide direct technical assistance to get businesses and assets verified on Google
Diagnostic	<p>Online trip planning is now ubiquitous. Visitors frequently start preparing for a trip to a destination about 2 to 4 weeks in advance and make decisions by doing research online. The meetNKY Resident Sentiment Survey found that after word-of-mouth, search engines, social media (Instagram, Facebook, etc.) and online review sites are the most popular tools used to help plan trips. A business that is not listed on search engines and review sites like Google effectively do not exist for most visitors.</p> <p>In addition, most advertising happens online especially when hoping to reach customers (visitors) outside of the local area. Most operators are small establishments that must wear many hats and many times learning new technology or advertising ways is not a priority - they often need support and technical assistance to engage with new technology.</p>
Action Item	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine staff lead • Get google training & become a grow with Google partner • Develop various co-op digital marketing opportunities • Identify training program or partner if not being done by staff • Create website information and other materials • Engage partners to promote workshops, webinars & meetings • Design plan to continue the education of business and maintain program

Partners

- Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce
- Kentucky Small Business Center of Covington
- Tourism Master Plan Advisory Committee
- Kenton County Economic Development
- Campbell County Economic Development
- Boone County Economic Development
- Team Kentucky-Department of Economic Development
- Local Media

Case Studies





North County NY Chamber Digital Marketing Training

Source: northcountrychamber.com

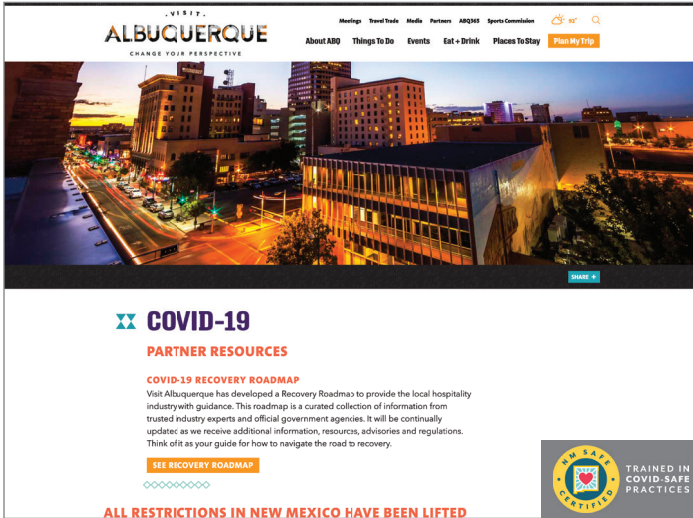
The North Country, NC Chamber of Commerce offers a digital marketing training series designed to help businesses find and attract new customers, clients, suppliers, and employees by creating a digital marketing strategy, building your online presence, utilizing online platforms such as Google/social media effectively, and so much more!

8 Educate Hospitality Workers

Location	Entire Region
Origin	meetNKY
Budget	 Marketing and Promotion for Ambassador Program (\$) – Low (<50K) Employee Training Sessions (\$) – Low (<50K)
Sources of Funding	<p>Bluegrass State Skills Corp. (BSSC), a group attached to the Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development that helps private-sector businesses establish industry-specific training programs, recently approved over \$3 million in funding to support training efforts at 20 facilities.</p> <p>Also approved was the Metropolitan College Tax Credit for just over \$4.5 million to benefit more than 2,300 students.</p> <p>BSSC's Grant-in-Aid (GIA) and Skills Training Investment Credit (STIC) programs assist employers statewide. GIA provides cash reimbursements for occupational and skills upgrade training at Kentucky businesses, while STIC offers state income tax credits for companies to offset the costs for approved training programs. Applications for both programs are accepted and considered for approval by the Bluegrass State Skills Corporation Board of Directors.</p>
Timeframe	 Short Term (Less than 5 years)
Key Performance Indicators	Hotel, restaurant, and tourism attractions reviews
Project Description	<p>Develop and promote southern hospitality by introducing a training program for employees and rebrand meetNKY/Cincinnati Tourism Brand Ambassador Program.</p> <p>The program should encompass a combination of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking opportunities to align local tourism efforts • Technical assistance to equip municipal officials with the know-how to market, brand, and implement successful tourism efforts in relation to southern hospitality.
Diagnostic	Those traveling to Cincinnati often overlook the offerings of Northern Kentucky. Hospitality staff can help play a role in attracting people to Northern Kentucky through its southern hospitality offerings. A tourism training and education program should be established for hospitality workers, with the partnership of meetNKY
Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SCK Launch - SCK LAUNCH focuses on labor market data to inform students and jobseekers about the region's future high-growth, high-demand careers in our top sectors (hospitality). The labor market data was validated with members of the local business community. • Local hotels and restaurants • Local Colleges & Universities

Educate Hospitality Workers (Con't.)

Case Study



ACE: Albuquerque Concierge Excellence

Source: visitalbuquerque.org

Visit Albuquerque created the Albuquerque Community Excellence Professional (ACE) program. The program educates front-line employees on:

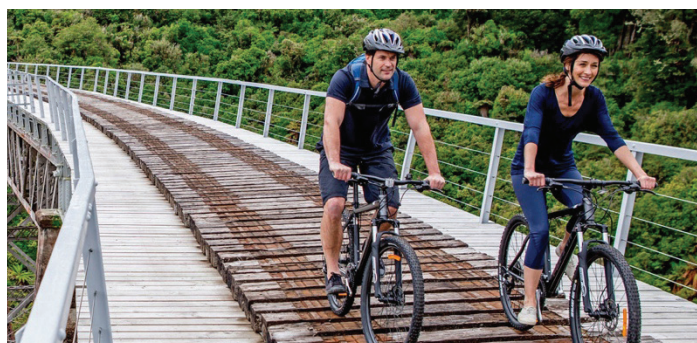
- Things to do and see in and around Albuquerque
- Do's and don'ts in customer service
- How to handle unsatisfied customers

They also offer tailored ACE classes for those businesses who would like their employees to get additional training. Those are created specifically for the business. The businesses' culture, goals and current customer service policies are utilized along with teach things to do and see in Albuquerque. To date more than 1,000 hospitality staff have been through the program.

9 Capital Improvement Grant Program

Location	Entire Region
Origin	meetNKY
Budget	<p>Include estimated total project cost and a breakdown of potential costs. (\$\$\$) – high (200K+)</p> <p><i>Note: Similar programs at the State (New York) or National (New Zealand) level have set aside between \$15 million - \$25 million annually for distribution</i></p> <p><i>In New York, the New York Tourism Grant Program has a minimum request of \$25k (for marketing project) with a 50% match or \$150k (for capital projects) with an 80% match.</i></p>
Sources of Funding	Northern Kentucky Tourism Region ARPA Funds - \$75,403
Timeframe	Short Term (Less than 5 years)
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total amount invested in assets Increased visitation at participating assets
Project Description	Capital funding for upgrades to key visitor assets in the region
Diagnostic	The diagnostic ranked the top 25 reviewed attractions and assets in the region, according to Google. Based on an analysis of the reviews, assets ranked less than 4.5 collectively share a number of issues, including overall maintenance and condition of assets, as well as, in some cases concerns about limited space for circulation and/or limited offerings.
Action Item	Explore partnerships with Kentucky Commonwealth
Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commonwealth of Kentucky Kentucky Department of Tourism

Case Study





Tourism Infrastructure Fund Eligibility and Co-funding Criteria - New Zealand

Source: Hikina Whakatutuki Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment

The tourism infrastructure fund (TIF) provides up to \$25 million annually to develop tourism-related infrastructure that supports regions facing pressure from tourism growth. The funds also aim to contribute to quality experiences for visitors and ensure New Zealanders can continue to enjoy their public spaces.

All local councils a few regional councils are eligible to apply and priority is given to projects that demonstrate the need for additional visitor-related public infrastructure.

10 Walkability in Downtowns & Tri-city Streetscape

Location	Downtown Covington, Newport, and Cincinnati
Origin	meetNKY Northern Kentucky River Region
Budget	 <p>Include estimated total project cost and a breakdown of potential costs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing a comprehensive plan (\$\$) - Medium (50K-200K) Investments in infrastructure and physical improvements (\$\$\$) - High (200K+)
Sources of Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land and Water Conservation Fund <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$200,000 to Newport for park amenities Municipal Funding Sources Surface Transportation Program Funds Transit Enhancement Activity Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ) Program Safe Routes to School Program (SRTS) Transportation and Community and System Preservation Pilot Program (TCSP) Tax Increment Finance Districts (TIF Districts)
Timeframe	 <p>Medium (3-5 years)</p>
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traffic counts on walking routes from city to city Inventory of existing wayfinding signage Identification of any parks/public spaces that can be used to encourage connectivity and walkability
Project Description	<p>This project aims to grow tertiary assets that support a prolonged stay by improving walkability throughout Covington, Newport, and Cincinnati and developing a tri-city streetscape and wayfinding plan.</p>
Diagnostic	<p>Northern Kentucky offers a diversity of lodging options that serve corporate travelers, airline groups, wedding groups/ events, entertainment groups, and many more. In fact, the region has seen a lot of growth in quality boutique offerings particularly in Covington, such as Hotel Covington, Pickle Factory, Airbnb, and short-term rental growth since the pandemic.</p> <p>However, the limited connectivity between lodging areas and key attractions hinders further tourism growth. Walkability is often interrupted by a lack of lighting and pedestrian infrastructure and the Rivercenter TANK shuttle has been interrupted through COVID, although restarted in late 2022. To improve connectivity between lodging not only in Covington but the region, public realm streetscape enhancements like improved wayfinding signage, lighting, and benches should be implemented between the Tri-cities to emphasize a regional tourism experience.</p>

Walkability in Downtowns & Tri-city Streetscape (Con't.)

Action Item

- Determine where streetscape improvements need to occur
- Use the existing guidelines to inform any decisions around the public realm and streetscape improvements

Partners

- Kenton County
- Covington Business Council
- Southbank Partners
- Renaissance Covington
- Catalytic Fund
- MainStrasse Village and other Neighborhood Associations
- Center for Great Neighborhoods
- Private Business & Property Owners

Case Studies



Truss Pedestrian Bridge – Buffalo, NY

Source: *Buffalo Rising*



Buffalo, NY's waterfront recently unveiled a new vantage point offering views of the Niagara River and Peace Bridge across to Canada. Connecting to an elevated overlook at its west end, the new span leads to waterfront views from a new observation platform, and features concrete arch supports and a steel deck structure. From the overlook, the relocated Shoreline Trail will soon offer about 700 additional feet of pathway along the Niagara River. It will eventually continue south adjacent to the Niagara River and the West Side Rowing club facilities, and then cross Porter Avenue and enter LaSalle Park.

Queen City Bike Ferry – Buffalo, NY

Source: *Buffalo Waterfront*

Buffalo has developed several creative ways to increase walkability and bikability to assets across and along their waterfront to other nearby commercial districts. The Queen City Bike Ferry offer pedestrian and bikers a 5-10 min trip at a \$1 cost to navigate between the Commercial Slip at Canalside and the Bike Ferry Landing on the Outer Harbor. From the Bike Ferry Landing, passengers have walking access to Wilkeson Pointe, Times Beach Nature Preserve and the Outer Harbor Event Space. For bikers, destinations include the Greenway Nature Trail, Buffalo Harbor State Park, Charlie's Boat Yard Restaurant, Outer Harbor Playground, Tifft Nature Preserve and the Outer Harbor bike trails.

11 Targeted investments in outdoor infrastructure

Location	Entire Region
Origin	<p>Key influencers of this recommendation include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linda Bray-Schafer - Campbell County Adventures • MeetNKY • Terri Bernstein - BB Riverboat • Jason Reiser: CORA (Cincinnati Off Road Alliance)
Budget	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investments in Infrastructure (\$\$\$) - High (200K+) • Marketing Campaign and Outreach (\$\$) - Medium (50K - 200K)
Sources of Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal ARPA Travel and Tourism Funding - Tourism and Destination Marketing Organizations - Economic Recovery Funding (Total \$5,346,250) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ meetNKY: \$883,155 ◦ Northern Kentucky River Tourism: \$1,024,686 • Kentucky's Tourism Development Incentive Program - Recreation and Entertainment Facilities, areas of scenic beauty or distinctive natural phenomena, cultural or historical sites <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ \$1,000,000 minimum project development cost can recover 25% of development cost over 10 years • Federal ARPA Marketing and Promotion Funds <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Northern Kentucky River: \$1,024,686
Timeframe	 <p>Medium (1-5 years)</p>
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trail and Park visitation numbers • Public Landing - Boat Ramp in Cincinnati usage • Conditions of trail entry/exit into river cities
Project Description	<p>These projects aim to create a strong regional connection that embraces all counties and a strong cross-jurisdictional identity and grow tertiary assets that support a prolonged stay. This can be achieved through enhancements in connectivity between regional tourism destinations especially by using the riverfront to highlight landmarks and enhance connections between existing retail districts and river cities.</p> <p>This project includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ovation Park Kayak Launch • Licking River Blue Water Trail • Riverfront Commons Launch • Regional Public Art Placemaking Investments

Targeted investments in outdoor infrastructure (Con't.)

Diagnostic

Part of what makes Northern Kentucky so unique includes proximity to the riverfront. Based on background document review, site visit, observational assessment, resident surveys, qualitative customer reviews, and stakeholder feedback, lodging/accommodations, attractions/experiences, food/beverage/retail, and travel/transportation draw most visitors and supporting longer stays. Northern Kentucky currently offers several activities around outdoor recreation such as, the B-line which connects different F&B clusters, Riverfront Commons Trail, and Riverboat Tours.

Although these assets are attracting visitors, there is opportunity to improve the connectivity of the region. According to meetNKY's 2022 resident sentiment survey, about 35% of respondents prefer to spend time with visiting family and friends through outdoor recreation activities. However, these same respondents ranked the quality of Northern KY's outdoor recreation at 3.58 /5 stars, this suggests room for improvement. Improvements to tertiary assets such as biking, hiking, and water recreation will have a direct positive impact on secondary and primary assets by incorporating the trails and the river as a part of the experience in getting to places like Cincinnati Music Hall, Newport on the Levee, and Ark Encounter. In addition, the trail network and river offer a great potential to connect all assets.

Action Item

Ovation Park Kayak Launch

- Reach out to owners of the park and determine their willingness to incorporate a kayak launch
- Partner with Kentucky river tourism agency to create a comprehensive plan

Riverfront Commons Trail

- Determine areas with poor connection to the rest of the trail network
- Partner with CORA for physical improvements and advertising

Licking River Blue Water Trail

- Determine areas with inadequate signage, boat ramps, and parking
- Partner with Kenton & Campbell County Public Works Departments to facilitate signage improvements from the roads pointing visitors to the trail
- Work with towns along the Licking River to implement necessary infrastructure for kayak/SUP launches

Partners

- Kenton County
- Northern Kentucky River Region
- BB Riverboat Tours
- Parks and Rec
- Cincinnati Off Road Alliance

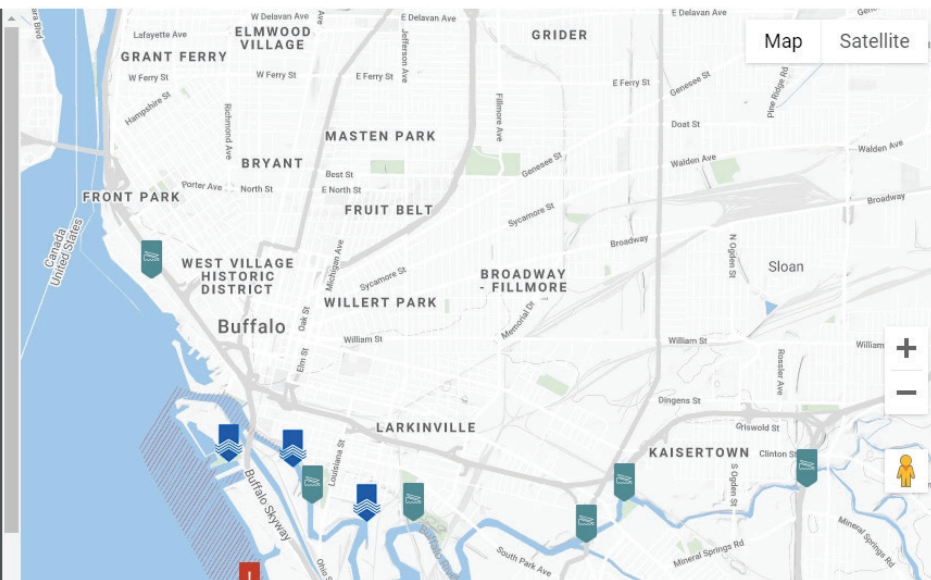
Targeted investments in outdoor infrastructure (Con't.)

Case Study

[PLAN YOUR TRIP](#)[GIVE BACK](#)

PLAN YOUR ADVENTURE

Zoom in for more locations, zoom out for the big picture. Click on any points of interest, then click "add to trip" to add them to your itinerary.

[Click to return to the map page](#)[Things to do on the Blueway](#)

Kayak and SUP Rentals and Buffalo Blueway Source: Buffalo Blueway

Buffalo and other parts of Western New York have been cut off from access to waterways by industrial development and transportation corridors. We envision a future in which everyone has equitable access to the waters whether you want to paddle, fish, or just sit and enjoy the view.

The Buffalo waterfront offers several locations to launch or rent a kayak/SUP/paddle boat, etc. The most popular location is known as Canalside. Canalside is located downtown on the Buffalo River. The BFLO (Buffalo, NY) Harbor Kayak Co. rents single kayaks for \$25/hour, tandem kayaks for \$40/hour, and paddleboards for \$25/hour. They also offer three types of guided tours (Silo City Paddle Tour, Silo City Sunrise Tour and Sunset River Tour). Other launch locations are scattered throughout the city. As these launches gained popularity, they became known as the Buffalo Blueway. The launches at Wilkeson Pointe, Buffalo Riverworks, Ohio Street, and Mutual Riverfront Park. Online resources like interactive mapping and trip planners are also available and over the coming years, there are plans to add paddlesport launches, fishing piers, boat docks, waterfront observation platforms, parking, and public art.

The Blueway was made possible by the Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper, a nonprofit that serves to protect and restore surrounding ecosystems in Western NY. Waterkeeper received \$10 million to develop the Blueway from the state's Buffalo Billion II economic development program.



Source: Buffalo Blueway





Source: Buffalo Blueway

Targeted investments in outdoor infrastructure (Con't.)



12 Bridge Placemaking

Location	<p>The seven bridges that span the Ohio and Licking Rivers are primarily located within Covington, Newport and Cincinnati and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brent Spence Bridge • Clay Wade Bailey Bridge • John A. Roebling Suspension Bridge • Taylor Southgate Bridge • Daniel Carter Beard Bridge • 4th St Bridge • 11th St Bridge
Origin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meetNKY • District 6 of KYTC • City of Covington
Budget	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investments in infrastructure and physical improvements (\$\$\$) - High (200K+)
Sources of Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative Community Grants: \$3500-5000 to artists used to implement creative solutions in Covington. • Nano Grants: Small \$250 grants to individuals to implement creative ideas and projects that improve the community and unite neighbors.
Timeframe	 <p>Medium (3-5 years)</p>
Key Performance Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedestrian activity on each bridge • Walk scores • Accident reports for each bridge
Project Description	<p>Support for year-round placemaking projects on key bridges</p>
Diagnostic	<p>There are seven bridges in the region that have the potential to increase pedestrian infrastructure and activation to enhance north-south connections for residents, visitors, and cyclists.</p> <p>The Northern Kentucky region has many assets for residents and tourists on both sides of the Ohio River. Its existing bridges are a key factor in the north-south connectivity and already help promote the region by combining offerings across the Cincy region.</p> <p>There is opportunity for the riverfront to connect key attractions and to further the unique story of north meets south and to activate bridges with creative placemaking tactics to encourage/facilitate crossings over the river. Additionally, most food and beverage nodes are located within 0.5 miles of riverfront, however gaps in lighting, signage, transit circulators, and safe micro-mobility infrastructure make these nodes inaccessible from each other. Bridge activation would encourage a larger customer base on both sides of the river for these businesses.</p>

Bridge Placemaking (Con't.)

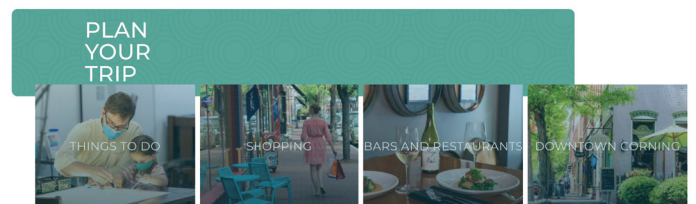
Action Item

Work closely with existing organizations to support and improve upon existing placemaking and activation efforts on the river crossings.

Partners

- Northern Kentucky University – Placemaking program
- Southbank Partners
- Municipal Partners (Cities of Newport, Covington & Cincinnati)
- The Purple People Bridge
- Visit Cincy
- Ohio River Way
- Tri State Trails

Case Study





Corning Centerway Bridge, Corning, NY.

Source: twm.la

This historic bridge was turned into a pedestrian-only linear urban park connecting the Corning Museum of Glass and downtown Corning's popular Gaffer District. The bridge provides direct, accessible connections between these two destinations and was designed as a destination itself, with interpretive signs, benches, glass pavers, greenspace and a painted maze that is a popular attraction with visitors and local children.

13 Improved Regional and Riverfront Connectivity

Location	Entire Region
Origin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meetNKY • Kenton County • Hamilton County/City of Cincinnati
Budget	<p>Include estimated total project cost and a breakdown of potential costs.</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wayfinding along key access roads – both state and county roads (\$\$\$) – high (200K+) • Improvements and expansion of Southbank Shuttle (\$\$) – Medium (50K-200K) • Connectivity along the riverfront (\$\$\$) – high (200K+)
Sources of Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation (SMART) Grant Program (\$1B, new) – The SMART Grant program will be a programmed competition that will deliver competitive grants to states, local governments, and tribes for projects that improve transportation safety and efficiency. • Kentucky is expected to receive \$4.6 billion for road improvements and \$438 million for bridge replacement and repair under formula-based road funding programs in the law, a 32% increase over current funding levels. These dollars will help address the problem of 534 bridges and 8,844 miles of highway in Kentucky that are in poor condition.
Timeframe	 <p>Long (5+ years)</p>
Key Performance Indicators	Investments leveraged and resources contributed to accessibility improvements
Project Description	Improvements to access and connectivity between assets in the region, along the riverfront and between Cincinnati and Northern KY. This includes but is not limited to streetscape improvements, regional wayfinding, transportation linkages, and enhancements to the South Bank Shuttle service.
Diagnostic	The importance of the Riverfront the regional tourism cannot be understated. Northern Kentucky's most highly rated food & beverage clusters are located along the banks of the Ohio River, including Main Strasse, Madison/Pike, Roebling Point, and Newport on the Levee. Riverfront attractions also rank third among residents as a draw to visitors to Northern Kentucky that also differentiate it from other tourism destinations. Yet the connections between these assets by car, foot, or bike are often lacking.

Improved Regional and Riverfront Connectivity (Con't.)

Action Item

Improving Access Between Cincinnati and Northern KY

- Contact the Transit Authority of Northern Kentucky

Improving Riverfront Access and Connectivity

- Work with Kentucky Waterways Alliance to clean up General James Taylor Park
- Work with local businesses to host pilot projects in James Taylor Park

Partners

- Kenton County
- Hamilton County/City of Cincinnati
- Park and Rec
- Kentucky Waterways Alliance

Case Studies



Rhode Island - Beautification Initiative Source: Scenic America

Rhode Island Governor Lincoln Chafee has unveiled a new initiative to beautify the state's gateways with enhancements including murals, landscaping and graffiti abatement efforts along Interstate roads. The installation, which included substantial surface repairs to the bridge surface, was funded in part through a qualification for an 80 percent federal match.



Circuit Free Shuttle Service Source: Buffalo Rising

Transit agencies in the state have made efforts to alleviate congestion on South Florida roads by partnering with shuttles, rideshares, and electric scooter companies to provide cheap transportation options that won't upend traditional public transit systems. Circuit shuttles offer an alternative to the controversial scooters and can complement or, in some cases, supplement existing transit options. Hollywood's Community Redevelopment Agency announced in April that Circuit's Sun Shuttle service will replace its Hollywood Trolley System.

Improved Regional and Riverfront Connectivity (Con't.)

Case Studies (con't.)



GOBike - Connecting Buffalo and the Southern Tier via Bicycle, Foot, and Horse **Source: *Buffalo Rising***

GOBike is finalizing a plan for an 80-mile Southern Tier Trail that will link Buffalo and the Southern Tier via bicycle, foot, and horse (with some snowmobiling). GOBike, together with Alta Planning & Design, completed a feasibility study that demonstrated the ability to create an impressive shared-use pathway between the City of Buffalo and the Town of Hinsdale, NY. Funding for the study included donations from local foundations, which were administered by the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo.

Appendix



Appendix A

Continuing Focus Projects



1. The Future of the Northern Kentucky Convention Center

The Northern Kentucky Convention and Visitors Bureau began collecting an additional 1% transient bed tax in 2017. This development fund has been earmarked by three county ordinances for the enhancement and potential expansion of the Northern Kentucky Convention Center as a primary focus project for the funds. In 2019, the CVB, along with the center, conducted a consultant's study with recommendations for enhancements and expansion of the convention center. The City of Covington has reserved land for potential enhancements of the center as part of the master plan for the former IRS site. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the bureau and center will need to decide the best course forward for this site if there is not a full recovery of the meetings and event industry until 2025. Current plans include an additional look forward consultant's plan for the site and decisions on the proposed land site as well as the financing strategy for this project.



2. The Film Industry in Northern Kentucky

Kentucky has the 12th most lucrative film incentives in the country. With revised legislation passed in the 2021 session, the current incentive program offers \$75 million of refundable incentives for films and television shows filmed in the Commonwealth. The incentives are also now managed by the Kentucky Department of Economic Development. Film crews in Northern Kentucky offer a special demand generation for hotel rooms and catering as the average film requires time in market of anywhere from 6 weeks to 5 months based on the schedule. Television shows would require even longer in market and utilization of tourism assets. Georgia's film program is one of the most lucrative in the country. It generates thousands of hotel stays and catering opportunities. Northern Kentucky should continue to support the industry and promote the incentives as part of Film Cincinnati, the region's film commission, and the CVB should continue to expand the knowledge base on potential film sites in the region.



3. HB 500 Legislation from the 2022 session and Bourbon “Tasting Rooms”

Landmark legislation passed in 2022 with House Bill 500 could give Northern Kentucky a potential big win in the continued bourbon boom in the Commonwealth. For the first time, distilleries that carry a Distilled Spirit Producers license (DSP), will be allowed to open a remote “tasting room” anywhere in the Commonwealth under that license. This could be a potential enhancement of the growing bourbon industry in Northern Kentucky and another differentiation between the region and Cincinnati. The Cincinnati metro region is a very attractive market for large heritage distilleries in the Commonwealth with more than 1.5 million residents in the three-state area. The CVB will continue to develop interest in the market along with their partners in regional economic development and will develop an incentive program for a consultant to secure interest in the offerings in Northern Kentucky. Bourbon Tourism continues to bring millions of tourists to the Commonwealth and the region needs to continue to grow its offerings.



4. Flight Development and Support of CVG International Airport

The Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport is critical to the growth of Northern Kentucky as a destination of choice as well as support travel to The Cincy Region. The CVB will continue to support air service development at the airport to domestic and international routes. The CVB will continue to grow its international marketing reach with their Cincinnati partners to promote the region for increased tourism. The CVB should leverage their ARPA funds to secure additional airlift to the airport as well as support these flights in the first years with enhanced in market advertising and promotions.



5. Designations for Big Bone Lick State Park and Outdoor Experience Enhancement

Outdoor recreation continues to be a strong travel demand generator in many markets and current research supports that talent development for a region needs to ensure there is a robust offering of outdoor recreation sites as this is a primary motivation for selecting a destination to work and live. The CVB will continue to enhance their focus on supporting, promoting, and developing outdoor recreation sites with local, state and federal partners. In particular, the CVB should be a strong supporter and partner in researching and enhancing a federal designation for Big Bone Lick State Park. This park is the home of modern paleontology and is located in a rural area that could benefit from enhanced tourism development including recreational vehicle sites and entertainment. This will require a long-term plan for securing a National Park level recognition for the site and coordination with state and local partners on its growth.

Appendix B

This report draws on more than 35 analyses (Exhibit 1) from publicly available data as well as data and assumptions from the client, discussions with experts and business leaders, and site visit. The objective is to help diagnose gaps in offerings, and where investments and policies would prove most effective in advancing the region's existing challenges and potential opportunities in advance of recommendations and policy recommendations.

Exhibit 1		
Module	Supplemental Analysis	
Supply Analysis	Source	Year
Lodging/Accommodations		
	Google Reviews	
Attractions/Experiences		
	Draft Licking River Blue Water Trail Study	
	Feasibility & Strategic Planning Study for the Future Expansion of the Northern Kentucky Convention Center	2019
	NKY Attractions Sheet	
	Northern Kentucky in a Nutshell	
	Northern Kentucky 101	
	Zartico Asset Map	
Food & Beverage/Retail		
	Google Reviews	
Travel/Transportation		
	Economic Impact of the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport	2018
	Economic Impact of the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport	2020
Demand Analysis		
Visitor Analysis		
	meetNKY Resident Survey	2022
	AirDNA Annual Available Listings	
	Northern Kentucky Resident Sentiment Towards Tourism	2020
	Kentucky Department of Tourism Co-Op Planning and Opportunities	2022
	Longwoods International Northern Kentucky Travel Visitor USA Profile-Overnight	2020
	Longwoods International Northern Kentucky Travel Visitor USA Profile-Daytrips	2020
Visitor Profile & Preferences		
	Demographic analysis utilizing ESRI Demographic and Income Profiles for the Metropolitan Areas of Cincinnati, Louisville, Lexington, Indianapolis, Lafayette, Columbus, Dayton, Charleston, Huntington, Nashville, Evansville	2022
	Tapestry Segmentation analysis utilizing ESRI Tapestry Segmentation Area Profiles for the Metropolitan Areas of Cincinnati, Louisville, Lexington, Indianapolis, Lafayette, Columbus, Dayton, Charleston, Huntington, Nashville, Evansville	2022
	Visitor Profile, Cincy Region, Source: Destination Analysts	2019

Administrative Capacity		
	Cincinnati Development Strategy & Economic Growth Modelling Report	2015
	2020 State of Kentucky Northern Kentucky Economic Impact Study	2020
	State of Kentucky Economic Impact of Visitors in Kentucky 2019	2019
	Reconnecting Covington Commissioner Presentation	
	meetNKY Public Realm Enhancement Strategy	2015
	KY Tourism Development Act Report	
Business Environment		
	Cincinnati Tourism - Key Messages from VIP Interviews	
Stakeholder Interviews	MeetNKY Advisory Committee	
	<u>Community Groups</u> Jeanne Schroer – <i>President & CEO Catalytic Fund of NKY</i> Karen Finan – <i>One NKY Alliance</i> Bev Holiday – <i>Business Liaison Officer, City of Newport</i> Lee Crume – <i>Northern Kentucky Tri-Ed</i> Will Weber – <i>Southbank Partners</i> John Ellison – <i>Director of Sales and Marketing, Convention Center</i> Gretchen Landrum – <i>Executive Director, Northern Kentucky Convention Center</i>	
	<u>Northern Kentucky University</u> Jenny Sand – <i>Director of Economic Engagement</i> Stacey Stith – <i>Director of Web & Digital Strategy</i>	
	<u>Economic Development Practitioners</u> Joe Shriver – <i>Kenton County Administrator/Deputy Judge Executive</i> Jeff Earlywine – <i>Boone County Administrator</i> Matt Elberfeld – <i>Campbell County Administrator/Deputy Judge Executive</i>	
	<u>Hospitality Focus Group</u> Justin Ham – <i>General Manager at Hotel Covington</i> Art Santomo – <i>General Manager of the Radisson</i> Shelly Riddle, <i>Cincinnati Airport Marriot</i> Emily Badger – <i>Lisse Steakhouse General Manager</i> Shawna Dunaway – <i>Director of Sales at Marriot RiverCenter</i>	
	<u>Assets Groups</u> Eddie Lutz – <i>Director of Sales Arc Encounter</i> Emily Carabello – <i>Carabello Coffee</i> Terri Bernstein – <i>BB Riverboats</i> Matthew Geerlings – <i>Kentucky Symphony Orchestra</i> Brad Hill – <i>Managing Partner for American Legacy Tours</i> Brad Kim – <i>The Carnegie</i>	



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