

An aerial photograph of a wide river at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon to the left, casting a bright, golden glow across the sky and reflecting off the water's surface. The sky is filled with soft, orange and yellow clouds. In the foreground, a modern building with a circular section is situated on a grassy bank. The river flows from the background towards the foreground, with a small island or bend in the middle. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

# 2024-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE BOARD OF MANAGERS OF SoIN TOURISM

Facilitated by

ZEITGEIST CONSULTING

**DMO  
PROZ**



# 2024–2026 Strategic Plan for the Board of Managers of SolN Tourism Executive Summary

## **GOAL** Champion Destination Enhancing Development

### **Objective A**

*Continue to Lead the Conference Center Campus Conversation*

### **Objective B**

*Advocate for Passenger Rail Service in Southern Indiana*

### **Objective C**

*Advocate for the addition of a Cruise Port as part of the Jeffboat Project*



## **GOAL** Advocate for Destination Experience Upgrades

### **Objective A**

*Continue to Support Initiatives to Highlight the Falls of the Ohio and Origin Park*

### **Objective B**

*Analyze Opportunities to Enhance the SoIN Events and Festivals Culture*

### **Objective C**

*Provide Advice and Counsel to Local and State Transportation Interests to Enhance Destination Mobility*

## **GOAL** Continue to Build Awareness, Appreciation & Support for the Visitor Industry and SoIN Tourism

### **Objective A**

*Continue to Communicate the work and impact of SoIN Tourism to community and business leaders*

### **Objective B**

*Continue to Evolve SoIN Strategic Investments to Enhance Quality of Place and Life for area Residents*

# Vision & Mission

Vision is the “What,” as in “What do we want for our future?” Mission is the “How,” as in “How will we accomplish our Purpose and Vision.”

All three Statements are crucial to the success of any organization... and for a Destination Marketing Organization, they serve as the North Star for everything the Board and professional Staff do.

## SoIN VISION STATEMENT:

*Southern Indiana will be recognized throughout the nation for its sensational Quality of Place... and celebrated as one of the most welcoming and inclusionary destinations in the Midwest.*

## SoIN MISSION STATEMENT:

*As a brand-driven and collaborative destination leader, SoIN Tourism celebrates, promotes and advocates for the region as a collection of rapidly evolving communities and experiences with a captivating Quality of Life.*



# 2024–2026 Strategic Plan for the Board of Managers of SoIN Tourism

## **GOAL** Champion Destination Enhancing Development

### **Objective A**

#### ***Continue to Lead the Conference Center Campus Conversation***

##### *Suggested Tactics:*

- Continue to work with governments and developers on concepting final design, configuration and financing plan for the Conference Center
- Provide advice and counsel on the onsite campus Headquarter Hotel to ensure the campus is attractive and competitive
- Work with Amtrak and passenger rail interests to site a station at the Conference Center campus
- Encourage the establishment of a timeline to ensure continued SoIN investment
- Develop a partnership agreement with the Town and developer (if applicable) to outline communication protocols and responsibilities
- Provide regular updates on progress to ensure ongoing public support for the project
- Work with facility owners to develop booking policies that will provide the highest level of ROI for the region

## **Objective B**

### ***Advocate for Passenger Rail Service in Southern Indiana***

#### *Suggested Tactics:*

- Support Amtrak's interest in a corridor study to develop data and a case study for why passenger rail will be a success in Southern Indiana
- Work with public transportation interests to connect their goals with that of the Conference Center and the broader economic development strategy for Southern Indiana
- Build local public support for commuter rail service through the region, citing recent transportation challenges during bridge closures

## **Objective C**

### ***Advocate for the addition of a Cruise Port as part of the Jeffboat Project***

#### *Suggested Tactics:*

- Spearhead & coordinate the cruise aspect of the redevelopment project
- Work with Cruise lines to identify opportunities to develop onsite river landings
- Analyze opportunities to develop a feeder system of transportation & shuttles and shore leave itineraries
- Begin to envision future events & festivals that could augment and attract cruise visits





## GOAL

### Advocate for Destination Experience Upgrades

#### Objective A

***Continue to Support Initiatives to Highlight the Falls of the Ohio and Origin Park***

*Suggested Tactics:*

- Continue to serve as the convener for conversations that could lead to Federal designation of the Falls
- Work with the Falls Foundation and other groups to light the Underground Railroad and Lewis & Clark portions of the Falls
- Continue to communicate the progress of Origin Park to regional audiences to build local support for further enhancements

#### Objective B

***Analyze Opportunities to Enhance the SoIN Events and Festivals Culture***

*Suggested Tactics:*

- Investigate opportunities to develop events that align with festival weekends across the River to build multi-night stays in SoIN
- Analyze opportunities to develop events highlighting the the region's Lewis & Clark heritage
- Consider the opportunity to develop a self-managing SoIN Events Council to coordinate scheduling and group purchasing as well as provide networking and training on event production

#### Objective C

***Provide Advice and Counsel to Local and State Transportation Interests to Enhance Destination Mobility***

*Suggested Tactics:*

- Work with One Southern Indiana in support of their transportation initiatives
- Continue to advocate for SoIN branded Wayfinding Directional Signage
- Work to develop event-based shuttles as a proof of concept for regular transit lines

## GOAL

### **Continue to Build Awareness, Appreciation & Support for the Visitor Industry and SoIN Tourism**

#### **Objective A**

***Continue to Communicate the work and impact of SoIN Tourism to community and business leaders***

*Suggested Tactics:*

- Increase visibility in regional media, explaining the importance of the Visitor Economy and SoIN Tourism's role in its growth
- Identify opportunities to engage residents in conversations about the future of SoIN
- Consider developing an Ambassador program, creating formal liaison relationships with region community governments

#### **Objective B**

***Continue to Evolve SoIN Strategic Investments to Enhance Quality of Place and Life for area Residents***

*Suggested Tactics:*

- Develop New Guidelines to more effectively ensure the highest possible ROI of Tourism Capital Development Fund as a strategic investment.
- Consider adding Sports Turf as a Capital Investment strategy
- Analyze opportunities to expand the Tourism Capital Development Fund program to encourage additional festivals and music events
- Consider whether sustainable responsibility projects warrant their own category within the Tourism Capital Development Fund





# Background Intelligence

The following intel was gathered from the Clark-Floyd Counties Convention & Tourism Bureau Staff and Board of Managers. We launched an online survey, prior to our Planning Workshops, that asked the following questions. The responses included here to provide context and nuance for the Strategic Plan.

**Imagine a perfect world in 2035. What does the tourism landscape look and feel like? How has the visitor product and experience changed?**

**BOARD:**

- The Falls is a national park or monument. The Convention Center is completed, as is the Amtrak Station bringing more and more people to the area.
- Our focus is on nature and our connection to the river.
- Exciting, vibrant downtowns with a host of activities that appeal to all ages. More athletic venues.
- Communities have transformed and their doors are wide open for welcoming tourists. Promoting local is still a priority but group travel is much more prominent than in years past. Guests are traveling further for experiences, more travel via plane so the tourism marketing dollars need to stretch into other states to remain competitive.
- We have thriving downtowns in both Jeffersonville & New Albany. Trolleys transport people from the Convention Center to our downtowns and to the developing Jeffboat area.
- Origin Park has developed and is bringing regional visitors to the area. Clarksville's south end development along with its new convention center is bringing regional visitors to the area. The proposed railroad station in Clarksville's south end magnifies the attractiveness of the area promoting tourism growth in both Clark and Floyd Counties.
- SoIN Tourism is a one stop shop for all things going on within our County. Contacts, calendars, events, venues etc could all be reviewed, contacted, and supported financially and via marketing.
- Softball and Pickle Ball complexes have been developed.

**STAFF:**

- The waterfront is fully built-out, seamlessly connecting Jeffersonville, Clarksville and New Albany along the Ohio River Greenway and its new diversions in Origin Park. There's easily accessible dining, entertainment, retail and other amenities along the journey. The 2nd phase of the conference center has been open for 3 years and the new hotel in South Clarksville brings the total room package to 600. Meeting planners build off-site events into their conference agenda including dine-arounds in downtown New Albany, cocktail receptions at the event center in Origin Park, and morning fitness walks to and across the Big Four Bridge. Meanwhile, in the more suburban areas, a critical mass of ball diamonds, soccer fields and courts provide inventory commitments allowing for the marketing of combined facilities for the youth sports organizers. Yesterday's economy hotels have been upgraded to new and progressive flags. There are now four signature music festivals held across the riverfront - the new amphitheater at the former Jeffboat site, on green space in downtown Clarksville and at New Albany's riverfront amphitheater (which now holds 10 events per year). The commercial development once envisioned, but long stalled, for the NoCo Arts and Cultural District has been completed and it is a bustling neighborhood.
- Downtown redevelopment in Charlestown, Sellersburg, Borden and Georgetown has taken hold and these communities are now experiencing the benefits of tourism as destination management tactics are starting to spread out visitation throughout the community, taking pressure off the very popular urban core.
- With so much development around our downtowns and outdoor recreation, Clark and Floyd counties are becoming more than just weekend or drive destinations. Visitors are staying closer to a week as they can build out lengthier itineraries exploring our state parks, extensive trails and world-class adventure park (Origin Park). This paired with dining and shopping options ensures visitors have plenty to do during a 5-7 day stay.
- People know the destination much like Brooklyn, Bucks County, PA and/or Franklin, TN. We are a distinctive areas that people seek out when they want a destination that isn't city, but is a unique and exciting destination!
- It's more cohesive and much more online. Paper information will have almost completely dwindled by 2035.
- AI will have forced SoIN Tourism to make visitors feel more connected to the region in other ways.

**With so many new initiatives on the horizon, what projects moved forward in the past 24 months that may need a concerted effort to get across the finish line?**

**BOARD:**

- The Convention Center.
- Plans to move the SoIN Offices.
- Soln Tourism needs to be intimately engaged with the conference center efforts. All READI projects should receive support from Soln since many of these projects will lead to future "quality of place" and "quality of life" initiatives which promote tourism.
- Baseball field upgrades for tournaments. The Monon Trail.
- Origin Park, which has the potential to attract visitors from surrounding states.
- Push for more events, more venues, more amenities and expanded sports tourism.

**STAFF:**

- Origin park will be great for the area...bringing in millions of visitors for a one-of-a-kind experience.
- Conference center.
- Downtown Clarksville is now bustling with restaurants and shops to attract more business. Portions of South Monon Freedom Trail are open for us to promote, but the State is still working on funding to fully complete. We are looking for regular outfitters to help provide outdoor rec equipment (bikes and boats) for people coming in from out of town. Downtowns have benefited from state/federal funding, but there are still storefronts available to fill. SoIN helps get the word out about new businesses, parks and other attractions within the space.
- Origin Park. Conference Center. New offices.
- The website redesign.



**Aside from what is already happening, what is the next game-changer for the destination? What is the one thing that could be built (or enhanced, if it currently exists) that would further elevate the image of SoIN as a preferred destination?**

**BOARD:**

- Each community in our service area is really working on enhancing and growing the parks, I would love to see us really dive into SoIN being the go to place to experience and enjoy nature.
- Developing the Jeffboat site.
- A festival similar to the St James Art Festival with juried artists from Indiana. Or, an Art Museum similar to the Speed in Louisville.
- The proposed railroad station in Clarksville's south end will have a far-reaching impact on visitation for the entire region, making it much easier for visitors to travel to our area.
- If/when the Convention Center is completed, it will bring more hotels and people to the area.
- Large inside venues for shows and events. Inside and outside weatherproof sports venues.
- Softball parks
- Harmony and communication with the 3 cities

**STAFF:**

- A sports complex that can house multiple different sports for all ages. It's the last piece of the destination puzzle.
- Sports facility upgrades
- Lodging at Starlight/Borden. This area now has enough going on to warrant an overnight stay. A bed and breakfast at one of the old farmhouses or even a few Air BNBS would be great for this area.
- Origin Park!
- Our area values its internal perception as an arts and cultural area, however this does not carry over to how visitors perceive the area. The addition of an event space that highlights area artists and interactive digital art may help us stand out in that aspect.
- There's talk of an Amtrak station in conjunction with the conference center. That would be HUGE!
- Branding.

## **What do you feel is the greatest challenge that the Destination currently faces?**

### **BOARD:**

- Our proximity to Louisville and the perception that there's more to do there than in SoIN.
- Lack of understanding on the part of some locals as to the importance of regionalism.
- The greatest challenge that the destination marketing organization (DMO) faces is maintaining relevance and showing how their services and professionals can add value via promotion and consulting to guide tourism businesses in a way that brings more visitation to their business.
- Parking in both downtown Jeff & New Albany. Clarksville needs a downtown face lift. Lack of local tours to attractions so that visitors can see highlights of our area.
- Regrettably, community tribalism is slowing what could happen locally. Finding a way to get everyone pulling in the same direction is key to the area's growth and success.
- Money and support from all stakeholders.
- Overshadowed by draw of Louisville. Reputation of not having safe walkable amenities for visitors.
- Getting local government on board.
- Working together with the 3 cities.

### **STAFF:**

- No common or agreed-upon regional vision among elected officials.
- An identity/brand that stands out. Covering two counties that have both city and rural attractions makes it hard to figure out what to describe first. Also, people think Indiana is just cornfields and cows, and Nascar and basketball, which is not at all the case. Also, being in one state, but so close to a major city in another state messes with our identity a bit, too.
- The communities competing against each other.
- Lack of collaboration amongst stakeholders. Multiple narratives create confusion and the messaging of some local governments is not in line with how we are trying to be perceived as a destination.
- Finding the unique brand for the region that all can get behind with cohesive, consistent messaging (instead of everyone working as individual cities/fiefdoms).

**The Clark-Floyd Counties CTB's greatest strength as an organization is....**

**BOARD:**

- Dedicated staff who live in the communities they're promoting.
- Networking, knowledge sharing and promotion of businesses.
- The Staff and a Board that works together for the good of both counties.
- Diversity of the Board.
- The ability to work with other groups.
- The people that work at our organization
- Large geographic area of interest. Buy in by many governmental organizations.
- Jim Epperson.

**STAFF:**

- Talented and dedicated team
- Everyone works really hard at their job to ensure the area is uplifted by our efforts.
- Collaboration and innovation (internally and with partners).
- The determination of the small staff.
- The people genuinely hold a deep affection for SoIN.
- Our commitment to collaboration and partnership building.
- Jim Epperson. Truly, his expertise and knowledge is something you can't put a number on.



**The greatest challenge that Clark-Floyd Counties CTB faces is...**

**BOARD:**

- Having businesses take advantage of the services and knowledge that the Clark-Floyd Counties CTB has to offer. As they say, "you can lead a horse to water but you can't make them drink". Businesses have to get involved and take time to work alongside the CTB.
- Making the community aware of our vital role in making this area a better place not only to visit, but also a better place to work, play and live
- Overcoming the concept that we are only a visitor center rather than an organization to promote our entire area.
- Buy-in from local communities and the need to work together instead of fighting one another in a winner-take-all environment.
- Money to do what we need to do.
- Infighting. Small mind thinking. Lack of big vision. Lack of confidence.
- Getting hotels to report numbers.
- Communication with the 3 cities

**STAFF:**

- Resources and time to take on bigger projects.
- Time and resource constraints
- The rate of personnel changes poses a challenge in sustaining the momentum required to enhance the SoIN brand. The need to frequently retrain due to turnover hinders this process.
- Lack of cooperation and collaboration amongst local governments and businesses inhibits our ability to leverage the collective strengths and resources of the community to create compelling tourism experiences and promote the region effectively.
- Many of the small businesses who work with us are unfamiliar with marketing and don't understand its big-picture worth.

# STAKEHOLDER INPUT

*Like the Board and Staff, we also launched a separate online survey for Stakeholders. The following intel was gathered from the greater Clark-Floyd Counties tourism partners. Those responses are included here to provide context and nuance for the Strategic Plan.*

## **Imagine a perfect world in 2035. What does the tourism landscape look and feel like? How has the visitor product and experience changed?**

- We have a Convention Center, more hotels, more restaurants and attractions. Guests will come to Southern Indiana and not Louisville specifically.
- More visitors and more locals are getting out of their comfort zones to interact with more tourist restaurants and attractions. All Tourist restaurants and attractions are now more willing to help other tourist products succeed to better the visitor/consumer experience.
- Sustainable Travel: Carbon-neutral travel options, eco-friendly accommodations, and responsible tourism practices are the norm. Visitors prioritize destinations committed to environmental preservation. Cultural Immersion: Authenticity is key. Visitors immerse themselves in local cultures, with opportunities for hands-on experiences, cultural exchanges, and home-stays. In 2035 it would be great to have local attractions for residents and visitors. A museum, aquarium, etc to draw visitors. Something that does not compete with neighboring towns, but a resource and compliment to them. There is more to draw the visitor to our counties. Updated roads, variety of restaurants and entertainment.
- All vacant buildings filled with mostly small local businesses with living space above. Visitors able to enjoy safe, unique transportation from area to area. The K&I bridge will be opened for walking and passenger cars for travel. There are unique individual "cars" that visitors can hop in and rent that with a touch of a button will take them where they want. We will have already had a few producers shoot movies in our historical downtowns and wonderful greenway bringing a new type of visitor to our area. The Grand in New Albany will be converted back to its original theater. There is more public art walks through out the area, mostly from local talent. With technology visitors are able to follow maps and pull up history at every building, public art and business (should be able to know) A few local pieces visitors can leave their "mark" on too.
- Southern Indiana has an appealing and well-known regional identity; tourism is a multi-media experience.
- Clark-Floyd has become a destination for outdoor and park activities, including greenways, blueways, and parks.
- Larger base of visitors due to changes we have made currently to attract them.
- More upscale and recreational offerings across Southern Indiana.

**With so many new initiatives on the horizon, what projects moved forward in the past 24 months that may need a concerted effort to get across the finish line?**

- We need the Convention Center and more full-service hotels.
- Origin park, Rails to Trails, ways to keep connecting people from their homes to the businesses and surrounding communities.
- The Jeffboat reinvention project.
- South Monon Trail, downtown vibrancy, road construction with short-term pain but long-term benefits.

**Aside from what is already happening, what is the next game-changer? What is the one thing that could be built (or enhanced, if it currently exists) that would further elevate the image of SoIN as a preferred destination?**

- A Convention Center. This will really help us compete with Louisville.
- A revamp of the Green Tree Mall, and more well maintained attractions for kids/teens.
- SoIN is already on the right track (no pun intended) with plans for passenger train station.
- Public transportation that connects our businesses from Starlight to New Albany to Clarksville and Jeffersonville.
- K&I Bridge becomes the final link in the Falls Loop linking New Albany, Louisville, Jeffersonville, Clarksville as a multi-use trail.
- Floyd and Clark becoming a festival destination. Festivals should alternate from river city to river city. Jeffersonville, Clarksville, and New Albany. Themed festivals throughout the festival season and capitalizing on riverfront locations. See Newport, KY.
- Origin Park will be HUGE for visitors; South Monon will be great for locals.

**What do you feel is the greatest challenge that the Destination currently faces?**

- A lot of guests come to Louisville and then think of SoIN. We need to work on having SoIN be their main destination...and then look at Louisville.
- Limited features. Limited things to do to keep visitors in the area for a long period of time. This area tends to be a cheaper alternative to Louisville hotels and a pass thru to other areas.
- Filling the empty buildings with private local investors that will hire local people. Also getting each community working together as a whole.
- Ignorance of the assets, heritage, and charm of our small towns and cities, and the beauty of our landscape.
- Overall awareness of offerings and amenities.
- Getting the word out on what we have to offer.
- Our own identity.



**SoIN Tourism's (Clark-Floyd Counties CTB) greatest strength as an organization is....**

- The staff. Everyone is so passionate about the area and very welcoming.
- Providing information to Southern Indiana tourists.
- Their ability to effectively promote and market the area.
- Marketing.
- Creating networking amongst local businesses to promote unique collaborations in their bi-monthly meetings. Promoting our area outside our area. Bringing in tournaments or concerts to our area.
- Big picture thinking and collaborative spirit.
- Proactive, strategic, visionary.
- Championing local tourism.
- Stable leadership.

**The greatest challenge that SoIN Tourism (Clark-Floyd Counties CTB) faces is...**

- Packaging the visitor experience over the entirety of two counties.
- Not having a large space to sell larger inside events.
- Lack of an integrated regional identity.
- Lack of sufficient budget to get the word out to a larger audience.
- Structure of Board appointments by local government officials.

**What would make SoIN Tourism (Clark-Floyd Counties CTB) more successful than it is today?**

- More staff to focus on really bringing the large groups to SoIN.
- A stronger social media presence.
- Keep doing what you guys have been doing. Continue to host the networking events. To me as a small business this has introduced me to so many other partners. Not sure if anyone does this but maybe have your own "bus trip" for partners to see local attractions and what experiences you guys are selling for us. Most of the time the ones living and working here are the ones who do not know what's in their backyard! - so like a locals tour.
- Bigger budget. More resources for market research.
- Business leadership from those engaged not only in hospitality but other industries which benefit.

# COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

*In addition to the online stakeholder survey that was fielded, DMOproz spent two days in SoIN, meeting with community and business leaders to develop a higher level of nuance for the opportunities before the region. A synopsis of these conversations follow:*

## Challenges

- Slow going getting the Tour Freedom Criterium off the ground for 2026
- Affordable Housing & Workforce
- Lack of Vision and Collaboration

## Dreams for the Future

- Clarksville Dillards transformed into a E-Sports Venue
- Lighting the Underground Railroad Trail and Falls
- LatinX Festival in Clarksville
- Getting the Big 3 to get along (a monthly breakfast?)
- Revitalize the Colgate site
- Whitewater Park
- Embrace our Heritage (Lewis & Clark and Underground Railroad)
- Commercial Rail
- More Full service Hotel
- More River Recreation
- DEI
- Local transportation / Shuttle
- K&I Bridge

## Initiatives that ***Must*** be Supported

- Convention Center
- Amtrak
- National Monument at the Falls
- Origin Park

## Stray Thoughts

- How do we reward regionalism and collaboration?
- What could the Riverfront be?
- How to harness the optimism of new residents
- How to expand Bourbon into SoIN